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Adventure

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Vol. 113, No. 2 for June, 1945 Best of New Stories

NOVELETTES

Mutiny at Ten ..... E. HOFFMANN PRICE 12

Datu Ryan had worn the stars of a full general ever since the Japs had first swarmed in to occupy the Philippines, and from under the yellow parasol of Moro royalty that was his mobile guerrilla H.Q. he'd issued brass-hat orders for waging one successful campaign after another against the skibby hordes. No wonder he'd been insulted when the liaison officer from the newly landed U. S. forces now offered him only captain's bars. "But you didn't have to tell him where to shove 'em," remonstrated Jim Kane, the *datu's* second-in-command. "You might have said, 'Thanks, I'll take cartridges instead.' We've still got Japs to kill and now we'll have to do it without ordnance, just like we've been doing right along."

Diamond-Back ..... WILLIAM DU BOIS 62

An honest enemy, the rattlesnake. At least he gives warning before he kills. And Halek Tustenuggee, the outcast Seminole chief, was an honest enemy, too, Brevet Captain Carter had to admit. There he stood, less than a pace distant, that writhing six-foot diamond-back coiled around one copper arm; his rifle cradled in the other. "You know, of course, I'm going to send you to join my dead brother," the Indian said. "How do you prefer to die—by fang or bullet?"

SHORT STORIES

Captains All ..... FRANCIS GOTT 52

One skipper ought to be enough, you'd think, for a little old stump-masted schooner like the *Seal*. Rafe Preble, the new cook, soon found, however, that it took six to handle her—Cap'n Orn, Cap'n Sam, Cap'n Zeb, Cap'n Hiram, Cap'n Cy and Cap'n Oscar. Before the voyage was over Rafe was a cap'n himself and then, of course, there was Oliver—sort of a captain's captain you might say!

The Colonel's Powderpuff ..... BURT SIMS 78

"My God! He's a she!" Corporal Finkle's cryptic explosion was Lieutenant Corcoran's first inkling that the long-awaited "Andrews of Amalgamated Press" might present a set of problems to the Air Force Public Relations officer he hadn't quite contemplated. A correspondent who turns out to be a dream walking and then follows her introduction by announcing, in no uncertain terms that she's immune to wolves in Uncle Sam's clothing, can disrupt the routine of even the most efficiently operated fighter station.

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BE OUT ON JUNE 8TH ◆ ◆ ◆

Trojan Horse of Another Color ..... JOHN SCOTT DOUGLAS 94

The old-timers say that the low country of Guatemala has a "rainy season and a rainier season." When the latter came to Brent's banana *finca* the skies burst like an exploded water tank and flash floods raised the Motagua River to the levee top. Another inch would wash out the whole plantation. A good man, bossing the native work crews, might stave off disaster, of course, but a cripple and a drunk make a pretty weak wall to hold back a flood. Particularly when one of them would just as soon use the torrent to wash out the wrong the other had done him in the past.

Pride's Prisoner ..... WILLIAM ARTHUR BREYFOGLE 129

John Pride marched out from Bennington with the Green Mountain Boys to help whip General Burgoyne. He captured Tom Burke and when the fight was over there didn't seem to be anything to do with his prisoner but bring him home. It was lucky, in a way, that he did. Besides being living proof to his old woman that he hadn't just been projectin' around with a lot of hard-cider drunks, the lad turned out to be a better American than a lot of Pride's neighbors. He didn't even wait for the war to end to decide to stay immigrated.

THE SERIAL

Baby Fights Back (Conclusion) ..... WILLIAM C. CHAMBLISS 104

Taking on a bigger mouthful of Japs than she has any business trying to chew, the little *Traverse Bay,* with her destroyer escort, engages the Nip task force attempting to relieve Yank-held Eniwetok. And Jim Parker, in his torpedoless, bombless TBF Avenger, draws the tricky job of shepherding to safety ashore on the besieged island the marine fliers who had been cluttering up the carrier all the way south.

FACT STORIES

The Bloody Road to Mandalay ..... GORDON MacCREAGH 90

There is a grisly prophesy about the Burmese city which foretells that each new ruler will wade to it knee-deep in blood. King Mindoon Min, who founded the old capital, set it off to a good start by murdering all the engineers who'd had anything to do with building the city. Since then it's never been occupied until the waters of the Irrawaddy and Chindwin flow crimson—even as they do today.

Trackers—Southern Style ..... ROBERT L. GRIMES 126

Meet the *baquiano* and *rastreador* of South America, those fabulous guides and pathfinders of the mountains and the pampas whose exploits make the wiliest Indian seem like a novice at sniffing out a trail.

VERSE

Judge Colt ..... THOMAS W. DUNCAN 136

Rustlers and gamblers never budged
After I judged 'em! They stayed judged!

DEPARTMENTS

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Cover painted for Adventure by Rafael De Soto
Kenneth S. White, Editor

IF YOUR COPY OF THIS MAGAZINE IS LATE—

We regret that, due to the difficulties of wartime transportation, your *Adventure* may sometimes be a little late in reaching you. If this should happen, your patience will be appreciated. Please do not write complaining of the delay. It occurs after the magazine leaves our offices and is caused by conditions beyond our control.

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The Camp-Fire

Where Readers, Writers and Adventurers Meet

JOHN SCOTT DOUGLAS, who has written several stories for us in the past year about the Coast Guard and Lighthouse Service in Alaskan waters, jumps quite a few thousand miles this month in "Trojan Horse of Another Color" to take us to a Guatemalan banana *finca*. We asked him to tell us something of this new background and his familiarity with it, and here's what he writes about his story on page 94—

My stay in the east coast banana district of Guatemala was sheer luck. I'd been prowling around in the Peruvian and Bolivian Andes, and after returning to Panama was anxious to get back to the States to try to recapture some of the enchantment of those countries on paper while it was still fresh in my mind. While in Panama I chanced to meet a friend I'd corresponded with but hadn't seen since we parted at Sitka, Alaska, way back in '24. My friend had just sailed south from Guatemala, and his enthusiasm for that country was infectious. He promised to write a friend of his who was overseer of a banana *finca* if I'd change plans, taking a fruit boat up to Guatemala instead of returning directly home.

The opportunity was too good to lose. The overseer came down to Puerto Barrios and we hit it off at once. From the time we started riding the farm shortly after five each morning until we downed the last cup of delicious mountain coffee on his screened porch some time after midnight, I asked questions about the "banana game." Sometimes at night we'd ride along the tracks on mules to call on other overseers and continue the "banana talk." The overseers and timekeepers, (known as "tamkips"), ride almost entirely on mules. After riding the board walks laid along railroad trestles on these beasts, I can vouch for their surefootedness.

The *finca* I stayed at bordered the Mota-

(Continued on page 8)

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(Continued from page 6)

gua River, and beyond it lay the disputed territory claimed by both Guatemala and Honduras. In this No Man's Land, so far as I could judge, neither country had much authority. A native committing a murder or other crime in Honduras was usually safe once it was reached. By crossing the river, he could usually find work on a Guatemalan banana farm. My host, the overseer of the farm I was visiting, had a fondness for Honduraneans who had escaped a jump ahead of the *comandante*. He claimed their adventurous spirit made them better workers. It may be so, but an occasional overseer or paymaster was shot or hacked to pieces with machetes by these colorful characters.

One of the experiences related by my overseer friend was the fight to save the farms threatened by a flood. This flood occurred six months before my visit, but it was still the subject of liveliest discussion. When riding along the levee, my friend pointed out where fills had been made to save one portion or another. It was estimated that six feet of earth was added during the flood, but when the river receded, the levee stood at its original level. Cave-in and undermining of the banks caused a constant settling while the Motagua was on its rampage. During the flood, one engineer worked 68 hours without rest, then slept 'round the clock, but facts such as this are too unbelievable for fiction.

WOE is us! William Du Bois' Captain Carter novelette, "Diamond-Back," was originally scheduled for last month's issue. It was announced in the April *Trail Ahead* and the author's name appeared on the May cover. Last minute changes in the contents had to be made after the cover had gone to the engraver, however, too late even to make proper apology in the May magazine for the omission. We're embarrassed all to hell about it and promise to try not to duplicate the boner again. The author apparently has forgiven us for he sends along the following footnote to his story on page 62 to include in this department—

> The friendly Seminole chief in "Diamond-Back" has an historical parent. There really was a Holahte Emathla—a chief who was a good bit older than the one who made such an honest bargain with Carter and Grady, and destined for a much sadder end.
>
> The records at the Office of Indian Affairs tell us that this venerable Seminole was an ardent worker for peace between the two races—and an active collaborator with the military in its plan for wholesale Indian removal to the West. In the spring of 1836, he led a party of over 400 tribesmen to Fort Brooke on Tampa Bay, where they began their long journey via the Gulf, the Mississippi and the Arkansas. Led on part of this trek by Lieutenant George C. Mead (later the Union commander at Gettysburg), forced by low water to leave their boats and proceed on foot, mired on the last long stretch by the late spring rains, the Indians suffered cruelly from sickness. When they reached their reservation at last, their number was reduced to a little over three hundred. Holahte Emathla himself had died en route, and had been "buried" by his people in a stilted wooden coffin beside the river, with his tribal effects inclosed in this sarcophagus.
>
> Lieutenant Joseph Harris, who directed the route of this particular Seminole band from Little Rock, has this to say of their chief:
>
> "Holahte Emathla! A name which, had his destiny lain in a more favorable path, might have shone among the greatest and the best of the age. Our country owes his memory a debt of gratitude. . . . His was the directing and controlling spirit that guided this little band along its mazy path; his the hand that bound them with the friendly tie; his the heart at which the deadliest shafts were leveled. His virtues would have honored the patriot and the sage, and long and reverently should his name be cherished."
>
> It seems a generous tribute—even when we have discounted the purple prose of Lieutenant Harris' generation.

ONLY two recruits to our Writers' Brigade this month. Robert L. Grimes, who gives us "Trackers—Southern Style" on page 126 writes—

> Thanks for the invitation which permits an armchair adventurer to wave a hand in the *Camp-Fire* circle. Back in high school days I used to save nickels to buy the next *Adventure* so I cut my teen-age literary eyeteeth on the magazine, as it were. My father and I, while cutting winter's wood out in the woods, used to argue the relative merits of Pendexter and Cooper as writers of Indian yarns.
>
> On my seventeenth birthday (July, 1918) I was far enough away from southern Indiana to have charge of the U. S. Government's timekeeper's shack No. 3 at the old QMT, out of Norfolk. On that day I checked in and out two hundred and forty-five assorted laborers, gathered from the four corners, and nary a man lost an hour's pay, which wasn't bad for a kid in those days.
>
> Spent a year in Akron rubber factories to get schooling money, then to Ohio State two years, finally to Chicago, and there took a master's degree in Spanish. Taught high school Spanish and Latin until becoming principal of a grade school in Chicago—(where I am now) said school being noisily located on the SW corner of the municipal airport. (Take a look at our fore-shortened chimney as you go out.) Spent summers on farm, dabbled at writing (took a course with ASH), and traveled in Mexico.

(Continued on page 10)

Accounting faces an unusual situation during the postwar period. The need and demand for accountants—both beginners and experts—is large while the supply is short. That spells opportunity for many—perhaps for you.

The reason is simple.

Government uses many accountants. War activities enlarged old bureaus and created new ones—taxes, social security, price regulation, contract renegotiations, more indeed than we can name here.

Industry needs more accountants. Enlarged plants, conversion to peace production, more government regulations and reports, taxes, contract settlements, etc.,—all call for more and better records.

This need will persist for years—it will open many, many fine jobs, fine both in responsibility and pay. Nor will it end with the difficult postwar adjustment period.

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(Continued from page 8)

Am at present beating my way around the Horn on a rough literary sea. Twenty years ago began a novel. Then dropped to articles and stories for adults, some of which were published. Then the *SEP's* little sister, *Jack & Jill*, sent me thirty bucks for a story, and I've been writing juveniles off and on since. The other day a lady in the War Nursery Department at the central offices called and asked me when I was going to do those nursery books we'd talked about—so the regression to infantilism will soon be complete!

Anyone wanting to know more about the *baquianos* and *rastreadors* should read *Facundo*. It is one of the finest source books on early Argentinean life available. Written in 1845 by Sarmiento, who later became Argentina's greatest president, it presents vivid pictures of types of the times—the tracker, the mountain guide, the *gaucho malo* or "honor killer," and the *cantor* or troubador.

THOMAS W. DUNCAN, who joins us for the first time this month, hails from Casey, Iowa. After graduating from Harvard in 1929, where he won the Lloyd McKim Garrison prize in poetry, he went "back where the tall corn grows" to become a reporter, special writer and book reviewer on the Des Moines *Register*. From 1934 to '38 he was Professor of English in the Des Moines College of Pharmacy. He has had three novels published, many short stories in various magazines and a volume of verse, "Elephant at War." He writes us—

I am at present living in a Rocky Mountain cabin, completing a new novel and panning gold between paragraphs.

Good luck to him in both projects and we hope he finds plenty of pay dirt in both his prospecting and paragraphing!

G. S. CHAMBERLAIN of San Gabriel, Calif. piles Ossa on Pelion in adding further testimony to the actual existence of that much debated seagoing backhouse which Katharine Harrington (two months ago in this department) so solidly spiked to the roll of U. S. Navy craft which helped to raise the siege of Vicksburg during the Civil War—

A day or two later, Porter, whose buoyancy of spirit never deserted him, set adrift from his anchorage a dummy monitor, constructed out of a coal barge, surmounted by barrels. The incident was in the nature of a stupendous joke, but it had very practical results. The dummy passed the Vicksburg batteries under a terrific fire. When the *Queen of the West*, acting as a picket to the grounded *Indianola*, saw this new antagonist coming she only stopped to give the alarm and fled down the river. The supposed monitor stuck fast a mile or two above the *Indianola*, but the Confederate officer in charge of the work on board the latter did not wait for an attack, but set fire to the recent prize, which was in great part destroyed. (Both the *Indianola* and *Queen of the West*, it will be recalled, were Yankee vessels captured by the Confederates and under repair *by the Rebels. Ed.)*

Mr. Chamberlain quotes the above from that famous and invaluable compendium of source material, "Battles and Leaders of the Civil War" to bolster the facts as recounted in Carl D. Lane's article, "Backhouse Battleship," and goes on to add—

After studying the types of vessels, which both sides used during the Civil War, I don't consider it illogical that anyone would fail to recognize such a farcical attempt to fool them. Many of the craft which proved effective were actually coal barges fitted with mortars. Having no standard ship designs, as we know them, especially fitted for river fighting, everything afloat was pressed into service.

This was especially true of the Confederate Navy. Having few navy yards, little material, especially steel or iron, and practically no place capable of manufacturing heavy guns, they were badly handicapped. A very graphic work has recently appeared titled "Firearms of the Confederacy" which describes in detail how the South accomplished what it did. If anyone thinks that priorities and draft deferment troubles are a product of this present fracas, they will have an opportunity to change their opinion after reading "Battles and Leaders."

I would like to take this opportunity to say for the benefit of Mr. Thomas, that having been a continuous reader of ADVENTURE for as many years as it has been in existence (1910 to date) I have been a ringsider at many a *Camp-Fire* battle. I do not recall, in that span of years, one instance where an ADVENTURE writer did not have at least a 60-40 bulge on his challenger. It is that quality which has kept ADVENTURE out in the van for so many of us stay-at-home gunfighters, pearl divers, jungle tramps, etc., etc.

Them's mighty kind words Brother Chamberlain and appreciated but plenty! We'll try to raise that bulge to at least 65-35 proportions in the next thirty-five years and hope you'll be sitting in on the *Camp-Fire* come June '80 to check up on the tallying. And we hope, too, that Brother Thomas'll keep right on throwing his doubting at us, whenever he thinks he sees us in a vulnerable spot. That's the only way to keep us on our toes and our breeches from sagging. We almost thought, for a minute there, that he'd caught us with 'em down—in that backhouse of Admiral Porter's!—K.S.W.

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DISCOUNT TO DISCHARGED VETERANS—SPECIAL TUITION RATES FOR MEMBERS OF THE ARMED FORCES

MUTINY AT TEN

By E. HOFFMANN PRICE

INSTEAD of sulking in his tent, General Datu Ryan sat under the yellow parasol of Moro royalty, and drank nipa gin. Might as well drink it, he thought. We've got none of the other ingredients for making smokeless powder. . .

His four wives, shapely brown girls wearing scarlet formals, red shoes, and junk jewelry tiaras, were busy burnishing the guerrilla's cordovan boots, silver spurs, and the silver stars of a full general. They had to do something, now that Eric Ryan had sold them the idea

ILLUSTRATED BY FRANK KRAMER

"Halt!" the guard yelled, and leveled the shotgun. But he couldn't fire, for Pilapil had come too close to the big car and the important-looking man.

A Jim Kane Novelette

that ladies don't chew betel nut, not even when there is a split bamboo floor through the cracks of which one can spit.

Eric Ryan, self-made general, and Moro prince by marriage, was out of the war; he was out of sorts; and he had Jim Kane worried silly. Kane had fidgets, jitters, and at times he believed that red ants were doing close-order drill all over his hide. Wearily, hopelessly, he reiterated his plea.

"*Datu,* you shouldn't have told that liaison officer where to shove those captain's bars. The poor devil was doing his best, and you know army red tape from 'way back!"

The ferocious gleam in Ryan's bitter blue eyes told Jim Kane that he had said the wrong thing. This was doubtless natural, for it takes more than five years in Mindanao to convince a surveyor that a straight line is not necessarily the shortest distance between two points.

The four ladies in red flocked about to pin four silver stars on each of Ryan's shoulders. "Those brass hats are always reducing me. And talking about red tape," he grumbled in surly reminiscence, "all I did was privately and personally sock a major."

This had been some years before Pearl Harbor, when his battalion commander had tactlessly objected to Ryan's engagement to a wealthy *mestiza,* Manila's loveliest; and punching one's superior, even though not in the line

of duty, does the job for anyone who is tired of a military career. So, when the Manila beauty canceled the engagement because Ryan, dishonorably dismissed from the service, had lost face, Ryan went to Mindanao, became a Moslem, and married four native girls. At one stroke he had put in their respective places the fickle fiancée, the United States Army, and red tape.

Ryan thumped the gin bottle on the porch slats, and so hard that the yellow parasol jiggled. "A captain, mind you! *Me,* a captain! When my gang has knocked off over seventy-eight hundred Japs, to say nothing of the times we couldn't wait around to count the pieces!"

"You might have said, 'Thanks, I'll take cartridges instead,'" Kane pointed out, as he had been doing, daily, for each of the many days since MacArthur's return to Leyte, a hundred-odd miles north of Mindanao.

Ryan grinned sourly. "Maybe it *was* tactless, since the poor punk was only a captain himself. He couldn't carry his liquor worth a hoot, and maybe he did think I was getting personal. If I live to be a hundred, I'll never forget the way he turned red, got up, wobbled on his pins, bowed, and almost fell on his face, then said, 'Sir, I cannot recommend that General MacArthur recognize you as an officer of the Philippine Army.'" He made a gesture, brushing the four Mindanao queens aside; Ryan would put on his own boots. "Do you know, I think the poor guy was scared of us? He thought I was nuts when I told him that three *datus* and one sultan are my fathers-in-law. So now we aren't recognized forces."

"It's the ammunition, the grub, the medical supplies we haven't got—that's what gripes me. We could have had them, only you sounded off!"

Ryan jerked upright, and dropped the boot he was about to put on. "I'd lose face, you idiot! I live here. You have just one wife, and wouldn't your in-laws rib her if you got reduced? Now, I have exactly four times that problem! Can't I hammer that into you? That's why I'm sitting tight, and letting the army handle the job."

"Listen, *datu,* General Krueger's only got three stars."

"Krueger worked up from buck private, and he's doing pretty well. Anyway, he's in Leyte and the war's heading north. So they wanted a captain to run the show in this forgotten corner of Mindanao! After all, MacArthur's got five stars. *He'd* still be ranking me, wouldn't he? Shut up and have a drink!"

JIM KANE preferred quinine. A Filipino medico, hiding out from the Japs, collected cinchona bark from an experimental plantation in the interior, and turned out quinine which, while undoubtedly not up to U.S.P. standards, did the work. That, and the elevation of Mt. Kalatungan, had taken the malarial sallowness from Kane; he had put on a bit of weight, though he was inclined to be rangy and angular, and just sufficiently horse-faced to make entering town as a Moro mountaineer tricky work. However, he could always attribute his nose and his height to Arab blood. And three years of Mindanao sun, with only a Moro turban to protect his head, had tanned his skin, and given his eyes such a squint that only a close observer could note that their color, grayish-hazel, was a bit improbable for a Moro, whether straight or mixed.

The way Jim Kane played it, he tried to keep the wrong people from getting too close. Sometimes they did, despite his efforts, and then he had the problem of deciding whether to leave in a hurry, or whether they should stay, permanently, at the site of their discovery. While none of these things had been taught at Purdue, Kane had learned them—some from Haji Maulana, the Moro schoolteacher; some from Lieutenant Ximenes of the Philippine Army; and a great deal from Bishop Jackson, of the First Evangelical Church of the Pagan Tribes of Mindanao.

"Have a drink anyway. It'll make your next quinine taste better!" the general repeated.

Kane took the bottle. The stuff was fermented nipa sap, distilled through a gun barrel; it was close to one hundred and twenty proof and tasted like a mixture of kerosene, shellac, and sheep-dip. He gritted his teeth, took a deep breath, and cast a helpless look at the monstrous Negro who was grooming a shaggy, knot-headed stallion the size of a Saint Bernard.

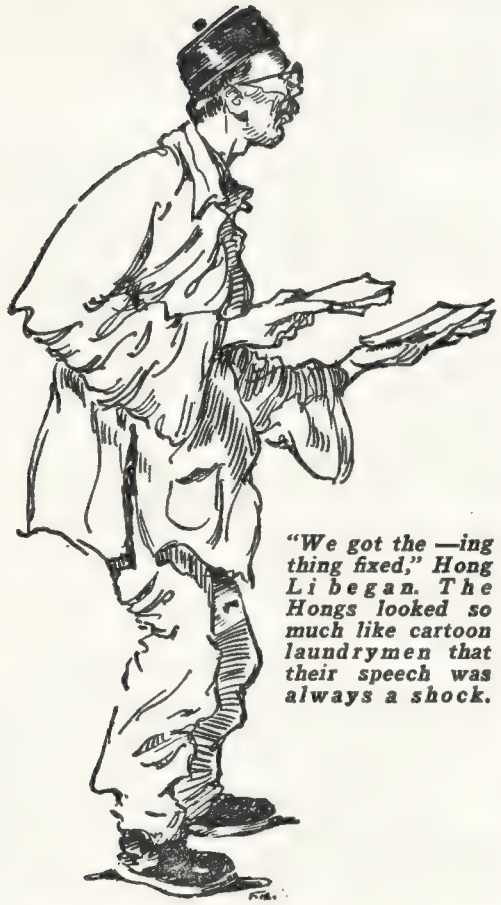
Bishop Jackson, who weighed almost as much as his war horse, Daniel-Come-to-Jedgment, rolled his eyes, and nodded. His big mouth moved soundlessly to shape the words, "Drink it, humor him!"

Kane, though doubting that anything could prevail against the stubborn *datu's* evil mood, took a swig, and shuddered it down.

The Black Bishop put away his curry comb and brush and got a big Bible from his saddlebags, the biggest Bible in the entire Archipelago, though in his hand it looked no larger than a prayer-book. His face, a purple-black that gleamed from sweat, was smooth and unlined. The only sign of age was his kinky hair, which was cotton-white. Jackson, discharged from the army in 1902, had remained in the Islands to preach to the pagan tribes, and had organized a church, making himself bishop thereof.

A big man with a big book; and since, in such a diocese, a big gun was sometimes a help, that was what Jackson wore, even when he put on the vestments packed in his saddlebag.

"General, suh," he began, "lemme exhort a bit, lemme read to you all from the Book of



"We got the —ing thing fixed," Hong Li began. The Hongs looked so much like cartoon laundrymen that their speech was always a shock.

Jedges. *Then the Israelites did what was evil in the sight of the Lord, so that the Lord delivered them into the power of Midian for seven years, and—"*

"Save that till Sunday!" Ryan stormed. "I know all about Gideon! I know all about the angel that told him to be a guerrilla! You know what you can read me?"

"No, suh, general, what do you all crave me to read?"

"You read," Ryan demanded, "the chapter about when a punk of a captain walked up after Gideon got through smiting, and offered him a pair of tin bars!"

The Bishop mopped his forehead with a red bandana. "Ain't no such chapter, suh."

"All right! Go thou and do likewise!"

The big Negro closed his Book. It wasn't every day that the meek inherited, and this was one day when the Bishop's prodigious voice could neither inspire nor persuade. Jackson, however, was a man of many devices; this was clear from the glance he flashed at Kane before mounting Daniel-Come-to-Jedgment, and riding from the guerrilla camp.

An hour later, the Bishop was back, and singing to the Moslems. It sounded like trumpets and drums, and they liked it. Ryan said to Kane, "If he thinks he can get a war by popular request, he's off the beam."

"Huh! That'd be mutiny," Kane answered. Then, coldly, "The Bishop's too good a soldier for that."

"I get it. Mutiny, bad as deserting in the face of the enemy. Kane, guardhouse lawyer, shaming me out of it, eh?"

And then three Chinamen came up to the shack. They had a fistful of occupation currency, which some sunshiner had called, with evil wit, "*skibby paper.*" Though the three were not identical triplets, they looked it. Hong Tien, Hong Kua, and Hong Li were pie-faced, chunky, beady-eyed. They wore ragged pants, felt-soled shoes, and shirts with the tails flopping out. They looked so much like the cartoon laundryman of forty years previous that their speech was always a shock.

"We got the —ing thing fixed," Hong Li began, referring to the jerry-built radio they had made up of spare parts. "They just bottled the Japs at Ormoc, and they're shellacking the ——s!"

Ryan looked up. Hong Tien carried on, reading from the currency, which, out of contempt, he used for notepaper, and other purposes for which the Son of Heaven had not designed it. "Navy makes end-play, landing in Mindoro. No Skibbies in sight."

He paused, and his brother, Hong Kua, picked up from his notes, "Jap troop concentrations heading for Fort Pikit and Reina Regente. Truck convoys coming from Davao toward Highway Three."

By now Ryan was interested, and sharp-eyed.

Hong Li now read, "According to well-informed sources, the yellow-bellies are heading for the north coast to sail for Leyte or Mindoro or something. Too bad we're on the retired list."

From the crest of Kalatungan, one could see Highway Three where it crossed the Mailag River at Mailag Town; the airline distance was less than twenty miles. This was the only road which connected interior and southeastern Mindanao with the northern seaports of the island.

"Where did you get that stuff?" Ryan demanded.

"From well accredited sources that decline to be quoted," the three Chinamen chanted, altogether, and solemnly.

"I mean, that stuff about being retired?"

"Well, for crissake, ain't we?" Hong Li countered.

They faced about. "Hey, give me those notes!" Ryan demanded.

Hong Tien collected the currency they had used to relieve a paper shortage, and handed

Kane the sheaf. Then, with un-Chinese haste, they made for a game trail at the edge of camp. Ryan was saying, "Funny they'd get a mess of reports, all at once—"

"Why'd they bother bringing them in, one at a time, with you sitting on your tail?"

"But stuff like this! Here, gimme!"

Kane, blessing the radio service experts, gave Ryan the notes. And then Ryan blew his top.

"They got it all down in Chinese!" He waved a ten-peso bill, the face of which was more closely scribbled than any short-snorter's card; and the Hong boys had used "grass" writing, instead of formal calligraphy, making things all the more outlandish. Even another Chinaman would have been stumped.

Ryan awakened the parasol bearer, who always slept, except when he had to follow the general about with the regal parasol. "Ali! Snap out of it! Run up that way, yes, up that game trail. The Hong boys just went that way. Tell them to come back, quick! Siggi, siggi!"

Ali stretched his legs.

Kane said to Ryan, "See what I mean? Big business. Fifteen highway bridges in the stretch of road within our striking distance. We can take our pick. And now what do we use for cartridges? You could've taken those captain's bars and left us sitting pretty."

Datu Ryan chuckled amiably. "Keep your shirt on, Jim! When we get through with reinforcements using Highway Three, we're going to get everything, including recognition. We stir up mutiny in the Home Guard or Constabulary, and that'll fix us up with ammunition."

THREE days later, Kane, tramping northward on Highway Three, was near Malaybalay, the capital of Bukidnon Province. Already the sinking sun made his shadow reach far to his right, a grotesque and bobbing shape, for he was bent under a hamper of charcoal which he was taking to the market place. Sweat and the dust from his cargo had combined to make his face the color of Bishop Jackson's; and, in a way of speaking, the Black Bishop was present in spirit, for Daniel-Come-to-Jedgment plodded just ahead.

The pint-sized stallion's pack saddle was heaped so high and wide as to give him the beam of a baby elephant.

"The Bishop," Kane told himself and his sore feet, "is probably worrying about his 'hoss,' and hoping he won't be shot for a spy."

Lieutenant Ximenes, Philippine Army aviator who for three years had not left the ground, was bent under a burden of fuel, and so were Garcia and Ortega, the survivors of a P.S. regiment. Like Kane, they wore palm-fiber hats, *camisas de chino,* and knee-length pants which once had been white. Haji Maulana, willing to go to any length for a good cause, had been induced to shed his red skullcap, gilt-embroidered jacket, green silk jodhpurs, and scarlet sash, and dress like a Christian farmer. What really broke his heart was the indecency of appearing in public without a pair of silver-mounted daggers and wavy-bladed *kris.*

Being a Moro, and hence a gentleman by Allah's appointment, the old schoolteacher carried no pack, but he had a staff with which he smacked Daniel-Come-to-Jedgment's rump, cursed him with Christian oaths that left a nasty taste on his thin, Moslem lips. This was not Moro country, and Haji had to watch both speech and gesture.

Two of the three Hong brothers brought up the rear. They wore mushroom-shaped hats, and trotted along like coolies, each with a *pinga*-pole on his shoulder, the front hamper of charcoal balancing the one which hung from the rear.

A truck packed with Japanese soldiers came roaring up from Mailag. A flight of P-40s circled into the wind, to level off to the height of the cogon grass, and land at the field west of Malaybalay. Women, balancing empty baskets on their sleek black heads, filed down the road shoulder; after a day in the market place, they were going home to a small *barrio* in the angle formed by the Suaga River, and Highway Three.

Though these ladies noticed the charcoal caravan, they were too tired for any exchange of greetings; there was no sparkle in their eyes, and their lips had long since lost the habit of smiling. While by no means starved, these Filipinas were neither plump nor sleek. Somehow, their faces mirrored their skirts and blouses, which were sun-bleached, threadbare, and, like the wearers, expendable and nearly spent.

When Kane saw them, and some minutes later, the *lavanderas* who squatted at the river's edge, alternately dipping garments into the water and thumping them against a flat rock, he was weighted down with more than the weariness of his march. Yet there was good omen in the fact that neither chatter nor song accompanied the day's work. Things were bad in Bukidnon, and since the women must be short-tempered, it would be easier to incite their Home Guard husbands to mutiny.

Shacks of bamboo and houses of mountain hardwood girdled Malaybalay, making the town sprawl and straggle, and almost blend with outlying *barrios.* From the center rose the weathered belfry of a church dating back to Spanish days; and there was the gray masonry of jail, and city hall, constabulary headquarters, hospital, postoffice, and bank. Some of the more substantial wooden houses had tiled roofs. A few of the cross streets were paved with cobblestones, as was the plaza. Malaybalay, in the wild heart of Mindanao, had spread since

The guerrilla band tramped northward on Highway Three toward Malaybalay. They were grotesque, bobbing shapes, bent under the hampers of charcoal which they were taking to the market place.

Highway Three had been cut from Fort Pikit, all the way to Cagayan de Misamis up on Macajalar Bay, and the spreading had been helter-skelter.

Japs from the aviation service command strolled haughtily about the town. Khaki-clad Filipino policemen wore pistols as well as truncheons. Smartly-uniformed constabulary privates lounged in the somber archway of the *comandancia.* Kane, bending under his load, saw all this from the corners of his eyes; and his first look at Bukidnon's capital, hemmed in on the east by wooded hills, and on the other side, by rolling plains overgrown with cogon grass, did not include anything of charm.

A few shops were open, though merely as a matter of form, since no one was buying, for there was nothing to sell; the New Order simplified merchandising. A filling station turned

its leprous face to the highway. The sun-bleached sign announced, though not with its former pride, that this was the shop and the service station of Victor Pilapil, *American Experienced Machinist.*

Tough for Pilapil, and not the right time for his talent; no gasoline to sell, and though, without doubt, every car in town needed overhauling, none was operating. Or so Kane thought, until he heard a triumphant horn blast, and a blue Packard whisked down the main drag.

Pigs and chickens scattered. So did pedestrians, and though they scowled, none made the gestures or shouted the abuse they once would have. A boy of eighteen or so had the wheel; beside him, a conspicuously well-dressed, lovely girl laughed and held her broad-brimmed hat, and lounged luxuriously against the green leather cushions.

Someone muttered, *"Puta'ng-na-mo!"* Another, satisfied that the young aristocrat's mother's morals had been amply covered, contented himself with observing, "We can't all be *politicos'* sons!"

Though he did not at the moment know it, Jim Kane had got his first glimpse of Jaime Tabinga, the governor's son. No kerosene for lighting or cooking, no gas for civilian trucks, none for buses, but plenty for "official" business. . . .

Haji, who had once driven his Adult Education Truck, with lectures and movies, through Malaybalay and thence to Koronadal Valley, knew the town, though he did not approve of it.

"These Bukidnons!" he would say, contemptuously. "One time they were Moslems, in the days of the Corralat Sultans, but they changed their religion and, behold, they are peaceful, like sheep, and they leave the coast and come inland. Now, to make a mutiny, we should talk to True Believers."

THIS had come up often during the days in which Kane's party had come down from the high slopes of Kalatungan, to cut wood, and to burn the charcoal which was to be their excuse for coming to town; and Kane's only answer had been, "Haji, I'm not mentioning any names, but I think Moros raised most of the hell up there on the north coast. There's no need to preach to them, and that's why we're just going to convert the peaceful Bukidnons. Wouldn't your eyes pop out if those peaceful folk did start kicking the gong around?"

"By Allah, by Allah, and again by Allah, verily, it would make the eyes jump out of my head!" Haji had retorted.

"Now, wait a minute! You've seen Christians put up a nice fight, haven't you? How about the troops that chased you all over Cotabato, in 1910, and made you behave?"

"They went to church, they ate pork, they drank whiskey, they laughed like fools," Haji had retorted, "but in no other respect were they Christians. By Allah, they were hard men, they had better guns, and they were honest. So I made peace with them, finally. But these Bukidnons!"

"Steady, Haji! Ximenes, Garcia, Ortega—they're Christians. So is the Bishop."

"Every rule," the stubborn scholar had retorted, "has its exceptions. As for the first ones, they are also Filipinos, and as for the Bishop, he has been with us for more than forty years. He is after all only a brown man baked black, so in some ways, he is doubtless better than we are. But what I beg to submit is this—the Bukidnons were once True Believers, and Satan spoke to them. There is therefore no heart in them, nor any good, and going to preach to them is a silly thing. Doubtless Datu Ryan was drinking too much of the forbidden when he ordered us to go."

All this came back to Kane as he followed Haji and the shaggy little stallion to the market place, just off the plaza.

A police sergeant stepped out of a restaurant and demanded identification cards. Kane held his breath. Next to Lieutenant Ximenes, Haji Maulana had the hottest temper in Mindanao, and there was just a chance that the old man, a descendant of many pirates, would be offended at the thought that any native of Christian Bukidnon dared accost him.

Haji grounded his staff.

Daniel-Come-to-Jedgment, being a prudent horse, and weighed down with burden even heavier than the gigantic Black Bishop, halted, and took up a high-shot posture which indicated extreme exhaustion; then, he straightened out, snorted, and cocked ferocious little red eyes at a motheaten mare hitched to a battered *caromata.*

Haji produced a forged card, instead of a dagger and a lunge, and Kane's palsy subsided. The old schoolteacher had all the cunning in the world but you could never tell what a riled Filipino will do, and the cop had a nasty, arrogant expression, and a voice to match.

Kane passed muster. The versatile Hong boys had made the cards, using a tiny printing press snatched on a raid.

Lieutenant Ximenes found his charcoal and sweat-stained card.

The two strange Chinamen interested the cop. He was a sincere collaborationist; at least, his chief was, and the cop was one of the world's great crop of people who believe almost any statement that is repeated often enough.

"Where are you from?"

Hong Li and Hong Kua told him, in a horrible pidgin-Visayan, that the ticket gave the story. At his insistence, the two brothers gave details. Nothing made sense. They could have addressed the man, faultlessly, in a number of

languages, including his own, and also, Japanese, but they didn't choose to. Instead, they killed nearly ten minutes looking stupid and pie-faced; and since Kane was in front of them, and could not well look back because his burden was too heavy and cumbersome, he suffered and kept on suffering. Each Chinaman had a shingling hatchet, and a warped sense of humor.

Finally, Hong Li—as a guess, for the voices were identical—said in weirdly mangled vernacular, "Sergeant, we are poor men. We hear nobody has oil, nobody has nothing. We get pay for haul these charcoals, we give you cumshaw, one peso."

The sergeant stalked away, patting his tunic pocket.

Haji led the way to a cogon-thatched booth in one corner of the market place. The square, canopied with pieces of *suali* matting stretched from uprights stuck into the ground, was empty. The booths were deserted, and there were no traders with produce spread out on the hard-packed ground. Here, while the charcoal vendors made camp, Haji tethered Daniel-Come-to-Jedgment in an alley.

Ximenes got ears of corn from his pack.

Garcia and Ortega had some dried fish they'd bought in a mountain village. Also, some small peppers, hotter than the charcoal fire which cooked their chow.

All was O.K. with the cops. For an appetizer, there were the smells from the vacant booths, and the dogs sniffing here and there for scraps; though of refuse, there was far less than there had been in the old days.

It grew dark, and fireflies and bats flitted through the translucent gloom. Haji was saying, "Praise be to Allah!" He licked his lips, and belched to prove his gratitude to God for a full belly; then, to Kane, "Shall we look for Eugenio Bondoc, or wait for him to find us?"

Bondoc was the governor's chauffeur, the liaison man, as it were, between Malaybalay and Datu Ryan's camp. "You might," Kane said, "see if you can find him. I'll talk to him; the rest of you lie low and follow general orders."

That meant, "Stand by, and every man for himself."

CHAPTER II

BUKIDNON POLÍTICOS

SOME days after MacArthur's landing in Leyte, and before "recognized" guerrillas had taken hold of the north coast of Mindanao, the puppet government sent Commissioners of Public Safety to take over the constabulary districts, to tighten up on law en-

You ease off beard in jigtime, men,
With Thin Gillettes—four blades for ten—
They save you dough and treat you well—
And your face sure looks and feels swell!
Outlast ordinary blades two to one
THIN
Gillette
BLADES
Gillette
4 for 10c
Produced By The Maker Of The Famous Gillette Blue Blade

Jaime was dazzled by the splendor of picturing himself as the man who would lead Datu Ryan into a trap.

forcement, and to crack down on any skeptic who wondered why the United States Army and Navy had to be annihilated so often.

Strictly speaking, Proceso Ligot had not been sent, since he had lived most of his fifty years in Bukidnon and Misamis; he had been appointed. Where in most cases, the Japs told the puppet government to send a stranger to supervise provincial law enforcement, in order to prevent leniency because of favoritism, and the fatally softening effect of in-laws, they had commissioned Ligot to take charge of Bukidnon principally because he was so well-known.

A look at him as he sat in the sparcely-furnished *sala* of his wooden house made it plain why jittery Japs and Quislings could not have made a better choice. Although a dozen years had passed since he had resigned command of a battalion of Scouts, he carried himself as commanding officers are supposed to, but rarely do. In a white civilian suit, he looked more military than most men do in uniform; his face had an uncompromising set, an inflexibility that came not so much from any feature as from the way each feature harmonized with each other.

There was about Ligot that calmness of one who has no doubts about anything, simply because, being interested in few things, he can believe those few intensely.

"Jaime," he said to Governor Tabinga's eighteen-year-old son, "take a seat. Your Aunt Basilia is out, and so are the servants."

Urbano Tabinga's son did not look as carefree as he had, perhaps three hours previously, while driving his father's Packard. He fumbled with the brim of the hat which he could have set on the carved *lauan* table. Even if there had been electricity to run the fan, Jaime would still have been sweating. He brushed back close-cropped black hair, and ran his fingers inside his collar.

He wanted a cigarette, but Commissioner Ligot was not smoking. He licked his lips, and wished that he had a drink. He wished that Proceso Ligot would break the suspense, and at the same time, Jaime dreaded the moment when Ligot finished that level scrutiny, unwavering, penetrating yet terrifyingly remote and impersonal.

Finally Jaime couldn't stand it any longer. "Don Proceso," he blurted, "I was just driving Doña Camila—ah—to her home at . . ."

He bogged down. The commissioner inclined his head with a motion far too deliberate to be called a nod. "That does not concern us. There are too many rattlebrained people who aren't supporting the New Order. Defeatists who believe that the Imperial Japanese Army can be beaten. People who do not believe that their independence is worth fighting for."

Jaime's hat slid from his knees. He let it lie on the polished *narra* floor, and half rose to his feet. "Don Proceso, I've belonged to the Junior Kalibapi ever since it was organized, I've worked, I've—"

"Please sit down." Proceso Ligot almost smiled, then checked himself. "Your loyalty is above suspicion. But your father, that is something else. If it were anyone else, I should know precisely what to do."

Jaime understood, and all too well. A week previous, the Constabulary had shot three *abacá* cutters, within an hour after their return to town, for having chewing gum in their possession: *prima facie* evidence of friendly dealings with Americans who supplied the guerrillas on the north coast, some sixty miles away. Jaime knew, and jerked flat against the back of his chair.

Señora Ligot, Aunt Basilia, was Governor Tabinga's sister; and not even Proceso Ligot could crack down on a brother-in-law without first groping for an alternative.

"You see, Jaime," the commissioner went on, "this embarrasses me. He is not only my wife's own brother, but also, the Governor of Bukidnon, my superior." His face tightened into lines of inflexible resolution, and he struck his upturned left palm a glancing cut with his right hand. "What can one do?"

Jaime's white shirt and white coat were by now perceptibly sweat-stained. The kid looked sick. "But what could I do? After all, Don Proceso—"

Ligot straightened up a bit more, though until he actually achieved this, the feat had not seemed possible. His hands lay easily on the

carved ebony arms of a chair which, because of its occupant rather than from its design, seemed rather like a throne. "You can save me embarrassment. Your father has been dealing with that guerrilla, Datu Ryan, that atrocious madman! If he hasn't actually been giving him supplies, he's at least sent him information, or we'd have had the man long before now."

"But, *señor!*" Jaime protested, taking courage from desperation. "Everyone has tried to get Ryan! They tried from Cotabato, and from Lanao. My father often told me that long before any party of troops big enough to do any good could get into the mountains, Ryan would be gone."

"To deal frankly with you," Ligot admitted, "there is much in what he says. It is common knowledge that Ryan is behind Mount Kalatungan, yet the knowledge is worthless to us, especially since your father has been helping him."

"What proof—"

"I do not want proof. I am glad that I do not yet have proof. Do you understand?"

JAIME read that face, and he understood. Ligot was honest, and having a single-track mind, intensely so; Ligot, for all the miles of highway he had built, lived in a house barren of luxuries, and still drove his pre-war Ford. Jaime had always known this, but the knowledge had lacked meaning until fanatical integrity threatened his father's life, and the gasoline supply for the big blue car, and Jaime's favor with Doña Camila.

The boy nodded. Ligot went on, "So, I am using the knowledge, not looking for proof. There is dissatisfaction in Manila, you understand, and there is only one way to save your father."

Jaime stuttered, "What is that, *señor?*"

"There is an opening for a clerk in the airport at Maramag. You will get orders to report there, at once. Every Filipino, regardless of position, must serve according to his ability. Only you will not go as far as Maramag. At Linabo Crossroads, you will pick up the Alanib trail, and keep going till you get to the headwaters of the river."

"Why, that's—between Mount Kalatungan and—"

"Mount Katanglad. Datu Ryan's range. You'll have a message for him."

"*Jesús, María, y Josep!* Me, find him? But how? How?"

"It is not difficult." Ligot smiled grimly. "It is almost impossible for a man in that hinterland to keep Ryan from finding him. Simply follow the trail, always upstream. And you'll go as a *tao*. But that's a trifling detail. You—"

"*Señor,* what good is that? I'll be murdered. How am I to go alone, when a regiment of soldiers can't risk it?"

Bondoc's face was angular and grim, a man of sufficient character to deserve the governor's confidence.

"Now you get to the point, young man. The son of Urbano Tabinga will be far more welcome than any ordinary recruit."

"But I don't want to be a guerrilla!" the bewildered boy exclaimed. "And you, of all people— How could I pretend even to be a guerrilla; what do I know of being a spy? *Por Dios!* how does that help—"

Ligot patiently carried on, "I'll give you a message. Ryan has been getting messages from your father, who for some reason feels that the Americans should return, and that they will stay, now that a few of them have returned!

"Listen, my boy." Ligot came out of his chair, smoothly, like a trained athlete; he stood, poised, a wiry, vibrant figure, body and mind and spirit a perfect unit, untainted by a single qualm or doubt. "Listen to me! What have the Americans done but bring in chewing gun, strange foods, movies, gadgets, luxuries? Gewgaws to catch the eye of women, and of men with the souls of women. Times have been hard since the Japanese came, that is true, though *you* have hardly been affected."

Jaime hung his head, and was ashamed. He had heard this lecture before, and he believed in it, ardently; only, he wanted to wait just another year before putting into practice this matter of leading a stern life.

"But the Japanese way is a manly way, the way of splendid austerity. It gives character. It gives—"

"I know, Don Proceso. I am ashamed, capering about as I have. But after all—"

"Certainly, you are young, you have that Perez lady on the brain, and you are courting her with gewgaws and luxuries, and you're afraid. Jaime, are you a man, a true Filipino, or do you want an American boot on your neck, to pay for your chewing gum and ice cream and movies?"

Jaime had no answer to this rhetorical question, and Proceso Ligot expected none, so he continued, "Then you will do as I say. Take a message to Datu Ryan, who will believe it comes from your father. And this time—" he rubbed his palms together—"there will be a different sort of ambush."

Jaime's eyes widened with wonder; he was dazzled by the splendor of picturing himself as the man who, single-handed, would lead Datu Ryan into a trap. Yet the boy was far from dull-witted, and after a moment, the vision faded, and he objected, "Don Proceso, if my father has really been sending someone with messages to Ryan, what will he think when I come?"

"I know your father's messenger. He'll be jailed for a night, and released, later. If Ryan has any spy in town, which he probably has, he'll hear of this, and will believe all the more that you hurried into the mountains because your father's confidential man was in trouble."

This satisfied Jaime, who said, "Datu Ryan is blotted out, and— But, to take credit for that would be to admit—"

"No, one won't brag, Jaime. Yet a frightful pest will be exterminated, all will be quiet and loyal in Bukidnon, and the national government will know that there was no truth in what has been said of your father." He sighed. "And I'll be spared great sorrow. Your Aunt Basilia is very fond of your father. And of you, Jaime."

"Thank you, Don Proceso. I kiss your hands, and Aunt Basilia's."

"Wait! There are still details I must explain."

CHARCOAL still glowed, and Haji had not yet heaped on it the leaves and grass needed to make a mosquito smudge, when a man wearing shoes, long white pants, and a black shantung coat came boldly toward the improvised hearth.

He raised his palm-fiber hat, which was of close weave. The glow of coals accented the red of his necktie, which was frayed, yet clean, like his shirt and his pants; clothes don't last long, with *lavanderas* hewing them against rocks, and pressing them into shape with charcoal-fed irons.

Kane, looking up, felt the sly, cattish stirring of the Chinamen beside him. He laid his fingers on Hong Li's wrist, meaning, "Never mind the shingling hatchet." Then, "*Buenos días*, Señor Bondoc. I hope it has been well with you, and with your family?"

Eugenio Bondoc, the governor's chauffeur, returned Kane's greeting, and then Haji's, for he knew them both from having seen them at Datu Ryan's stronghold in Kalatungan's volcanic heights. The others, sitting away from the light, he had to take for granted. He sat down on his heels, and they talked of charcoal, and made a show of haggling, and of gossiping. Bondoc said, for the benefit of passersby, "Maybe we can deal wholesale. His Excellency has a large house, and why fritter away your time in the market place? That is woman's work!"

"We seldom get to town," Haji objected.

Bondoc replaced his hat, but the light from the hearth reached up and under the brim. The unnatural placing of shadows made his face somewhat more angular and grim than it should have been, though by the strongest daylight, he would be seen as a man of sufficiently strong character to deserve the governor's confidence.

Bondoc's eyes were intent and keen. His brows beetled only a little, and his nose, while inclining to breadth, had somewhat more height at the bridge than did the average Filipino's. Deep lines seamed his cheeks, and made angles at the corners of his mouth, which was thin-lipped and broad; he had a stubborn chin, and his prominent cheekbones made a good superstructure for the lower buttressing of his face.

"Perhaps," he said finally, "you care to talk to His Excellency? With all respect, gentlemen, there is not so much to see in town these days, I refer to the sort of things which are pleasant for people from the hills."

"We are at home, with the *bondocs* even now at hand," Haji countered, making a play on the chauffeur's surname. "But have it to your taste, and let him go with you. Me, I must watch my horse."

"You saw us come in, señor?" Lieutenant Ximenes asked.

"I heard from others who saw you. The police miss nothing."

"*Ai!* That fool of a sergeant?"

"Some are not in uniform."

He got up, and Kane followed him. He could not hope that his men had brought no weapons except the several household *bolos* which are standard equipment for even the most peaceful; but he was sure that by now the undisciplined devils had concealed their contraband where it would be at hand, and yet not to be uncovered by the shrewdest searcher. A *kris*, a *barong*, or a pistol—no use asking, when only a fool would expect the truth. The order had meant, they would insist, "Do not bring rifles, rockets, or cannons."

The last named were *lantakas*, some of brass, some of bamboo bound with the rattan, and at the best, capable of throwing a two-inch ball perhaps a quarter of a mile; a heavier

charge of homemade black powder would burst the barrel.

And Haji would add, "Neither did we bring any *kampilanes,* though God is the Knower, and search us, *señor.*"

But as he followed Eugenio Bondoc down a side street, Kane could not help reflect, uneasily, that it was far simpler to bring the ingredients of riot and street fighting to Malaybalay than to compound the formula for mutiny of the Constabulary and the Home Guard.

Urbano Tabinga's home, as befitted his station, was a stone fortress which, by virtue of its occupant, automatically became a "palace"; the same term would have applied to a nipa shack, had the governor occupied one. The compound was enclosed by a stone wall with broken bottles set in mortar on its crest. The wicket, an iron grille, swung on hinges which did not even whisper.

The governor of Bukidon met Kane in a small room, right up under the roof. It had no windows, and its ventilation was mainly due to the clearances between the roofing tiles. A wick afloat in a bowl of cocoanut oil gave a smoky flame which thickened the air, and made Urbano Tabinga's high forehead gleam with sweat.

He wiped his rimless glasses with a blue silk handkerchief which made a discreet touch of color against his checkered tropical suit, a pattern which was fine enough not to scream, though it contained red and brown and black against a cream-colored ground. Urbano Tabinga's face was pleasing, and kindly; a soft face, though by no means devoid of character, rounded, yet not plump. And, soft-voiced, he said to Kane and Bondoc, after he had considered Ryan's message, "There is time, as you say, for the Japs are having trouble in Davao, and the rains have washed out a good deal of that roadwork they put in around Kioaoawan—"

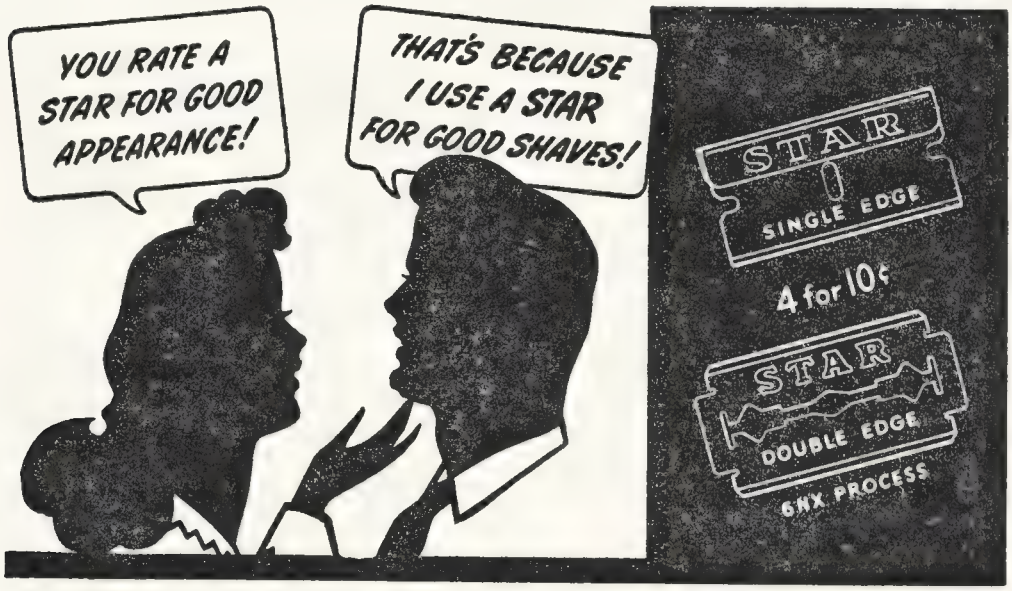
Kane grimaced in wry reminiscence. "When I passed through there, with my late father-in-law, there wasn't any road, except on the map!"

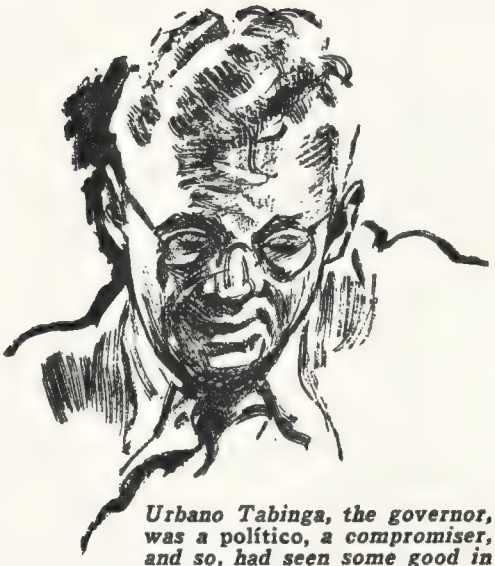
Father-in-law—it was strange, applying that term to Diane's father, that profane, that roaring, that fierce old man who had foreseen his own death, all but the hour and the place thereof, and who had demanded, "Marry the redhead! Hell, you could do worse. Don't be a coward—she won't hurt you—and maybe your marrying her'll take the place of the citizenship evidence we lost in Davao."

AS HE spoke to the governor, Kane was thinking, "Uh-huh, I got a wife, somewhere in Tarawa. Maybe she's come to Leyte with the Nurse Corps. I'm an idiot, taking chances like this. I'm married . . ."

Every so often, thoughts of a girl he could scarcely picture tended to make a coward of Kane. Red hair, freckles about the nose, an impudent nose . . . and greenish-gray eyes. The Bishop, who was also a "jedge," had married them, while Japanese shells *crummmmped* about them in the jungle. Not a shotgun wedding, but an artillery wedding. . .

The governor continued, "Then there would be time to ambush the Japs going to the north coast—yes, they can cut through the lines of the recognized guerrillas and get to Leyte—but you have no cartridges, not enough, and so you want a mutiny to open a supply of government ammunitions."





Urbano Tabinga, the governor, was a político, *a compromiser, and so, had seen some good in collaborating with the Japanese.*

"That is correct, sir. We have the men, though we'd welcome any Constabulary or Home Guard. Still, its cartridges, grenades. . . Good God, do you know that bamboo cannon and bamboo rockets have their limits?"

"Manifestly, sir," Tabinga answered, smiling blandly. "And you'd be happy if you could load yourselves and that unusual horse with cartridges."

A smooth, amiable little man, with perhaps half a century behind him, yet younger looking. There was youthfulness in his eyes, which were almond-shaped and protruded just enough to make for openness, rather than the brooding secrecy of his brother-in-law's deep-set eyes. There were no angles anywhere in his face. He persuaded, he did not drive or hammer or blast; he was a *político,* a compromiser, and so, seeing some good in collaborating with the Japs to protect his people, he had done so. Also, seeing real good in helping the guerrillas, he had done so. Nor could Kane decide whether this Quisling was less heroic than Tomás Confesor, the Governor of Iloilo, who had written a letter, long and bitterly courteous, to the delegates who had invited him to collaborate, and had then walked out of the governor's palace.

Tomás Confesor had, with Malay and Spanish courtesy, told a Quisling senator, a collaborating Filipino general, and a Japanese colonel to go to hell, and had not waited for an answer; Confesor's words had been such as to make Kane salute whenever the man's name was mentioned. Yet, sitting there in the attic, Kane began to consider that Urbano Tabinga might, in his own way, be just as heroic.

Tabinga remained in the midst of them twenty-four hours a day risking detection. He was at the mercy of Eugenio Bondoc's slightest slip, and solid, rugged Bondoc could slip. Saying, "This for those traitors!" Tomás Confesor had walked out, but Tabinga was thinking it silently, acting it, and staying.

"Cartridges," Kane repeated. "I'm so hungry for cartridges I can almost taste nitro powder."

"That comprehends itself." The fine, slim fingers of Tabinga's small, shapely Malay hand came together and made a plucking gesture. "Lifting them from a constabulary arsenal is not as easy as it sounds. There are too many *loyal* people working for the government. I cannot risk bribery, or having a storekeeper falsify the accounts. Who can I trust? It would be detected so quickly that the cartridges might never reach you, and if they did, the loss would warn everyone, and then—but you understand!"

"I didn't come here to invite you to suicide, sir."

"No, but honesty makes me tell you I am ashamed to sit here, and say, 'I am afraid to embezzle a hundred thousand rounds.' I am ashamed to sit here and say, 'Maybe you'd get the cartridges, but would I be alive to enjoy final liberation?' I am a widower, I have no family but my son, and he needs a father. Suppose I say this and you tell me, many of *us* have sons, and used to have families."

He smiled, and he got instant pardon.

These *políticos! Golden-voice, you-are-my-good-friend, I-am-giving-the-years-of-my-life-for-you. Now, you do not want* camotes, *you do not want rice . . . see these nice carpet tacks? That is what you would rather have for your peso.* And they walk away from their radios to buy and munch carpet tacks. Kane knew all this, he'd known it back home, and he could not condemn it here.

"The mutiny, sir! How are things? The people?"

"They cease to believe, many of them. Nobody but Proceso Ligot, my brother-in-law, believes the Japs can win. We hear only what itinerants from the coast tell us, and what the radio tells us, and it contradicts itself so badly that even a lot of *taos* wonder. But Proceso Ligot, that fine, smart man, that engineer, he believes, because he wants to believe." A confidential wink. "A man always believes what he wishes to believe."

Kane finally got him herded back to the point, and the governor went on, "Angel Escobido, the mayor's partner, *Escobido y Yerro, Ltda.,* they deal in copra, *abacá,* and have lumber interests and some plantations. The things they do might stir up mutiny among our Home Guard."

"Such as?"

"Labor draft, for defense work, road work, raising food. Escobido and Yerro get free labor for private jobs. Practically slaves. Escobido and His Honor, the mayor of this splendid city, are getting rich. No matter who wins, these *ricos* are now what you call super-*ricos!* Expose *that,* and maybe there is mutiny. But the work is yours. What can I do?"

Kane got up. He had at least won freedom from opposition. "Bondoc shouldn't see us too often. And we'll send some charcoal."

Urbano Tabinga offered his hand. "You think I am a weak friend, and I am. But my sister, Señora Ligot, the commissioner's wife, came to see me tonight. Her husband suspects me of not being zealous, and, Holy Mother, he is beyond corruption, beyond persuasion, beyond love or humanity. He believes that we need the Japs to cure us of American luxury, softness, give us Nipponese austerity, sternness, idealism. Now go with God, *señor!*"

"May you remain with Him!"

CHAPTER III

THE NEW DIS-ORDER

AS HE went with Kane to the gate of the compound, Bondoc said, "*Señor,* it is late, I must go with you to where your men camp."

"Curfew? We understand there wasn't any."

"There is not. With a curfew, one knows and can obey, which would make it bad"—he lowered his voice to a whisper—"for Ligot, because it is harder to catch people. But now, with no curfew, people take chances on going here and there to, let us say, mutter and hope. The secret police pick them up, question them, turn them loose, but finally, when all the guesses are pieced together, two-three-four men, they disappear. So, you are a stranger, and if one looks at you too long, listens too long, it is clear that you are by no means the *mestizo* you claim to be. I must go with you. I am His Excellency's man; I can vouch for you."

Good old Bondoc! The best kind of Filipino, and with all respect to valiant crackbrains like Ximenes and Haji; Bondoc's proved courage was coupled with all around steadiness. So Kane was at ease as they trudged along the dark streets.

Always the *político,* the governor had not been able to boil things down, but his rambling had to a degree been useful, since the recently organized Home Guard would inevitably reflect the diverse wishes, hopes, fears of all the classes in the region.

Sincere fanatics like Proceso Ligot believed that Japan could not be beaten, and that present hardships were no more than a fair price for independence already granted. MacArthur's proclamation on landing in Leyte had given the collaborationists good propaganda, since he had stated that each region, as it was reconquered, would once more owe allegiance to the United States. This frank statement, made to avoid any misunderstandings when the first hysteria of welcoming the Americans had subsided, had served Ligot and his kind.

Yet, according to Tabinga, many of the collaborators, mainly the *ricos,* saw things realistically; some, knowing themselves damned beyond redemption, were planning to head for China with as much plunder as they could carry. Others, equally convinced of Japanese disaster, preferred to gamble on an amnesty later on, and to clinch this, they were scrambling to do a few good deeds to prove, belatedly. that they had been patriots all the while.

Despite the stringent censorship, the locking of every known radio on Tokyo beam, rumors had come from Leyte and it was buzzed about that the first fifty Quislings rounded up had merely been jailed. Instead of summary execution, they'd face an investigating board; and time, bribes, the scattering of witnesses, and the all around good feeling attending the expulsion of the Japs and the distribution of American staples, and luxuries would make it easy for the collaborators.

As for the *tao,* he was as emotional and gullible as his American counterpart, Joe Doakes; it was fantastic what yarns he could believe, when these were dished out by a smooth-spoken leader. He'd never known actual liberty or freedom from dire poverty. He'd been exploited by his *jefe político,* and the *ricos,* and to him, liberty meant wearing shoes, being a government clerk or a lawyer, rising to be a *político* himself. Every day a fiesta, every man a *caballero,* no work, and plenty of movies and cock-fights. All this, the Quislings told him, would come to pass when the Japs finally won; just be patient.

And Kane, as he went with his guide, wondered if Urbano Tabinga might not have betrayed a few Jap convoys in order to win future gravy for himself. . .

Yet there was Tomás Confesor; and there was another governor who had given his life to lead a Japanese regiment into an ambush.

The town was silent. No light, no music, no laughter. In alleys, scavenger dogs snarled and wrangled. A pig grunted, and under someone's house, a distant cousin of Daniel-Come-to-Jedgment stirred restlessly.

Bondoc whispered, "Someone follows us. Don't worry."

A match flared behind them. The brightness was obscured, and then it came out of eclipse; this was repeated. Kane could taste trouble. Alone, he could have handled it, but it was too early in his mission for incidents which

would make the final moves difficult. He was glad that the governor's chauffeur was with him. A soft answer, by all means. Luckily, they were some blocks away from camp.

Two men stepped from a doorway. "Police," they said, quietly. "Halt for identification."

"You see?" Bondoc whispered, and stepped ahead.

Just routine, but Kane liked it less and less. Still, bolting, or cracking two heads together, would bring the cops down on the five who were in camp.

"I am Eugenio Bondoc, *caballeros*. Do you wish to see my card?"

"That is not necessary."

"Thank you."

But they still blocked the way. "Be pleased to come with us, *señor*."

"You do not seem to understand," Bondoc patiently objected. "I am the chauffeur of His Excellency."

IT WAS now too late for Kane to bolt without making a fight of it. Two men were now at his heels.

"We are looking for His Excellency's chauffeur," the spokesman said.

One of those in back seconded, "That is right, Bondoc. We have been looking for you."

"Looking for me, when you can find me at Don Urbano's palace?"

"Who said that we did not look there?"

Kane knew that the man lied; he was sure that they had been trailed from the "palace." It was now clear that the two in front were in uniform; cops, and armed.

"What is this?" Bondoc demanded, thoroughly irritated.

"We do not know. The chief wants you at headquarters. Is that unreasonable?"

"But I am His Excellency's—"

"Chauffeur. A good one. Still, you sound as if you were His Excellency himself!"

"Very well, *señores!*" He turned to Kane. "*Buenas noches!* Please do not wait for me. Tomorrow, there is more time. You will pardon me, but law is law."

"*Seguramente*. You have already been too kind."

Then the cops broke that up. "*Ándale, hombre!* You're going, too."

"You were looking for him, also?" Bondoc demanded.

"Certainly not, but he is with you, is he not?"

"Clearly, *señores*, he is."

"But look, I am—" Kane began.

"*Hombre*, what is it to us who you are? March, now!"

So Kane went. The entire business sounded like bungling, but there was no use arguing with a man who meant just what he had said—in effect, that Kane's identity was quite immaterial. Red tape. Ryan would love this . . . and he hoped that his five companions would not start turning the town inside out.

The prisoners were not booked. The man at the desk, who had been expecting them, nodded, grunted, called Tío Pepe, the turnkey, and went back to sleep.

Before Tío Pepe locked the door and picked up his lantern, Kane got a good look at the cell. It was empty, and it reminded him very much of the Cotabato jail, the one he had crashed from the outside. "This is a piece of foolishness," Bondoc grumbled. "Wait till Don Urbano misses me, wait till he speaks to the mayor. These idiots will have their uniforms peeled off!"

"You haven't the least idea what's wrong?"

"Wrong? Why, they are wrong, that's who!"

Kane pondered for a moment. "Don't they usually book a fellow before they throw him into the hoosegow?"

"Good God, *señor!* Ask someone who is accustomed to being jailed!" the indignant chauffeur exclaimed. "If there ever was a dumb trick!"

But Kane began to wonder whether this actually was the outright boner that Bondoc insisted it was; there was something ominous about the trailing, the identifying of the chauffeur, and the utter indifference as to the identity of his companion.

"Plainly," he told Bondoc, "this is no mistake. They fling me into the jug so I can't run around squawking about what happened to you. And since you are not booked, how will His Excellency know you are in the hoosegow?" Then, with feigned breeziness, "Well, here we are, and a man needs his sleep."

Bondoc agreed. His abrupt silence hinted that he also had begun to see things he did not care to discuss, when the jailer might be listening. He stretched out on the flagstones, and put his folded coat under his head.

According to the church clock, somewhat over an hour had passed, when the grille of the corridor opened, and voices echoed. A man breathed heavily, as though worn out by struggle; the drag of his feet indicated that cops were hustling him down the passageway. As the key rattled, he protested, incoherently, "But what have I—what is this—I tell you. . ."

The hinge creaked. One of the cops said, wearily, "Listen, Pilapil! We don't know. Shut up, *hombre!* Ask the mayor, ask the governor, write the president. Orders are orders; don't be a fool, save it for the judge."

The other chimed in, "He's right, Victor, we can't help this."

"Then tell my wife. Let her know."

The door slammed. "Why not? In the morning, Maximina will know, count on that," one assured him, but Kane sensed that the speaker had no intention of letting Pilapil's wife know where her husband was.

WHILE Kane and Bondoc and Pilapil, the "American Experienced Machinist," were wondering whether morning would increase or end their troubles, the Mayor of Malaybalay and his business partner, Angel Escobido, sat up and considered what had become a New Dis-Order.

Escobido was a big man; he had a big nose, a big jaw, and a massive head. His features were Spanish, and except for an unmistakable touch of the Oriental about his eyes, his expression was European, and so was his voice. Whereas a Malay's hands and feet are disproportionately small in comparison to his stature, Angel Escobido wore a number twelve shoe. The hand wrapped about a tall glass of beer was knotty, muscular, and square. The Gothic framework of one of Magellan's *conquistadores* persisted in this man who was a Filipino by birth, rather than by blood.

He took the big cigar from his mouth, made a snorting exhalation, so that for a moment, the gush of smoke, the scowl, the deep furrowed frown all combined to make Escobido look something like a volcano about to erupt.

"You are several kinds of a fool, Nicolas *mio*," he said to the sleek little mayor. "Those Japanese fooled us, they over-rated themselves; they are a bunch of hysterical women, with their idiotic *banzai* charges, their lies about victories. They're always annihilating somethng, then saying they made a strategic retreat to lead the enemy—a non-existent enemy, you comprehend!—into a trap for further annihilation. And then, they admit they had a slight defeat. I'm getting out, *compadre*, and there's room for you."

Nicolas Yerro's smooth face lengthened in a somber mask through which, somehow, there came a twinkle; perhaps the twitch of his little mouth, a subtle gleam in his little black eyes, or maybe it was an overtone in his voice, which, though not shrill, seemed so in contrast to Escobido's.

"It's bad, by God, it's terrible! They did make fools of us, but the worst is over. We've not done badly, and I am staying. After all, I am mayor. And what would I be in China—just supposing we did get to China, and weren't blown out of the water?"

Escobido clamped down on his cigar, swirled his beer, glared sourly at it. "We've made too many enemies at home. Do I have to draw a picture for you?"

Yerro fingered his chin, which was pointed. Despite his well-fed expression, there was a pinched look about him. Below the cheekbones, he did not have quite enough face to balance what he carried above the eyes. "Japs and their screaming, their *banzai* charges—Angel *mio*, aren't you doing something like that yourself?"

Escobido got out of his chair, and took a deep breath. He looked down, and laughed gustily, and so did Yerro, for both had caught the incongruity of the little fellow's implication that the mountainous one had become hysterical.

"It makes sense. I am a realist."

"That is what that blockhead of a Proceso Ligot calls himself. He's counting the minutes until the Americans are wiped out on land and sea. No, Angel, if that's the way you feel, then we break up our partnership, which pains me. *Escobido y Yerro, Limitada*, it has been beautiful, it has been profitable; Americans or Japs, it has made no difference. Look, *amigo*, we are both old enough to remember, didn't those Americans rage and scream, 'hang the Kaiser,' and what did they do?

"And they'll do no more to us." The little man giggled. "Those idiots, they'll send troops in, not to arrest us, but to protect us from the *taos* who dislike us."

Escobido rumpled his shock of dark hair. "Osmena isn't an American. He's got enough Chinese blood, 'way back, to give him good sense. You know what the Chinese do with the opposition party."

"But you're going to China?"

"That is different. I've had no hand in their politics. So, buy me out, no?"

"Nicolas Yerro, successor to *Escobido y Yer-*

ro, Limitada," the mayor recited, relishing the words. "Worth certain risk. And another thing. That PT boat you salvaged—they're terrible, I get seasick. PT boats are magnificent when they work perfectly. Oh, yes, over a hundred kilometers an hour, if you have aviation gas and if the engines are just right; all you need is full tanks, and then a deckload of drums full of hundred octane. The stuff His Excellency burns in his Packard, it stinks, it pings; he can't get gas good enough even for a car. You're the one who takes the crazy chance, Angel *mío.*"

The whimsical, taunting voice prodded Escobido. "Oh, I can't? Look! What is it that they burn at the airports? Who is it that supplies the lumber, the construction gangs? Who cleans up the debris after a bombing? My stupid little friend, can't I swap drums of truck fuel for drums of high octane?"

He paused, impressively. Yerro whisked a purple silk handkerchief from his breast pocket. The billowing of strong perfume drowned the reek of the oil which made his hair gleam. "I have no more to say. I will buy you out."

"In American money?"

"Or English!" Yerro giggled, took out his wallet, and produced a hundred-peso occupation bill, spat on it, crumpled it, flipped it into the corner. "Or would you prefer this?"

They both laughed heartily. Both were looking to the future, and the only difference was in the details of what they saw.

The haggling had not gone far when there was an interruption. The Number One boy came in. *"Patrón,* the chief of police begs to speak with His Honor, the Mayor. On the telephone."

"By your leave, *amigo!*" Yerro bowed to his partner, and followed the servant.

Some moments later, he returned, smiling, almost smirking his satisfaction with the world. "And there are two in jail for you, Angel *mío!*"

"Who are they?"

Yerro shrugged. "Does it make any difference? Any two able-bodied *fulanos.* And of course, Pilapil; take him also."

"Ah, Pilapil!" Escobido's somber face brightened. He winked, clenched his fist, and with the edge of his left hand, made a drawing cut across his elbow. "So *that* is how you persuade the lovely Maximina?"

Yerro bunched thumb and fingers of his right hand, kissed the tips, rolled his eyes and gazed ecstatically to the ceiling. "I told you I had foresight, but you do not believe me. Certainly this is better than enrolling the fool in the constabulary; he'd always be getting leave to go home to see her. But this way. . ."

Escobido nodded. "I promise you he won't get away as long as I'm around. But I tell you, it will be bad when that labor gang gets loose. I tell you it will be bad."

"Not as bad as explaining to every American destroyer's captain on the China Sea that someone sold you a PT boat. One bit of engine trouble—you make thirty kilometers an hour, instead of a hundred—and what wouldn't a Jap pilot give to sink something American, once!"

Escobido sat down, hitched his chair to the inlaid table, and in so doing, moved the table perhaps a foot. "You and your Maximina, there is room for you both."

"I love my family, and my country," the patriotic mayor said. "I have a nice house picked for Maximina. Now, in American money—"

They got down to business once more, and whenever the Number One came in to refill the glasses, Nicolas Yerro took time out to ponder on the sympathy and assistance he would offer the worried and bewildered Maximina Pilapil; he could do almost anything except rehabilitate her husband's filling station, and give it a supply of fuel. . .

LONG before dawn, the rattling of keys aroused the prisoners. Three cops accompanied the turnkey. "All out!" the sergeant commanded, and his men, without instruction, got busy. They handcuffed Bondoc to Kane's right wrist, and Victor Pilapil to Kane's left.

That done, they marched the captives to the area behind the jail. The lantern behind them projected their shadows across the cobblestones, and to the wall which enclosed the court.

Bondoc muttered, "Firing squads usually work in the plaza, for everyone to see."

It was clear that he got little hope out of this reminiscence, which Kane capped by saying, "A public job would give the governor a slap in the face. You're his man."

"What's this? What's this?" Pilapil demanded, his voice rising, and cracking. "Firing squad—what have I done? Where is Maximina?"

"Shut up or we'll club you!" a cop warned from the rear. "Get in that truck!"

The shift of the lanterns showed the truck which waited near the exit. The tailgate was down, and a cleated ramp had been set up. It gleamed with dew. "Get in!" the man in back ordered. "Watch your step, it's slippery."

A truck ride before dawn was not much relief from the sight of that all too suggestive wall; discretion would be in order in dealing with Urbano Tabinga's chauffeur. "I'm wondering," Kane said, as they cleared the head of the ramp, and got into the truck, "if I'm in this for being seen with the wrong man, or whether you're here for being with me?"

"Only God and the saints know!"

"But me, I don't know either of you!" Pilapil said, wrathfully. "This is a mistake! Let me see a lawyer. This is not right, we have not seen the judge; what are we guilty of?"

The driver goosed the throttle, and the roar of the engine blotted out whatever answer the police may have made. Kane said to Pilapil, "You're not in America. Your experience isn't doing much good tonight, *compadre!*"

By the reflection of the headlights from the masonry, Kane got his first good look at Pilapil, whom he had thus far seen only by bobbing lanterns. The man was perhaps thirty, a good-looking chap, with sharp, intelligent features. Plainly, he was indignant and incredulous and angry, rather than afraid; this was something which could not happen to a man with American experience. There was something else which Kane could not read; it was as though the man's background had come to the front, so that memory added to his confusion, and his utter outrage at the present turn of events. Pilapil spat, drew a deep breath, and shrugged; he could as well have said aloud, "Well, what a sap I turned out to be!"

Which confirmed Kane's feeling that the past was complicating the man's future, however brief that might be. Seeing that there was no one to fight, or to revile, Victor Pilapil turned his rage and his disgust back into himself, and accepted all the blame.

This much Kane sensed, somewhat from seeing the man's changing expression, somewhat from intuition, and feeling the relaxation of the wrist shackled to his own. But Kane saw something more, a second later, when the truck, getting slowly into motion, rumbled through the gateway—two vague shapes, so uncertainly glimpsed that he was by no means positive that he had actually seen anyone move in the half-gloom. The sweep of the headlights, as the truck turned, seemed to have come very near exposing two men who lurked in an alley between two warehouses.

This was no town for strollers who lacked a solid and important purpose. Eugenio Bondoc had given up hope, and it was plain that Pilapil had no expectation of assistance. Helpless, Kane saw no harm in that most dangerous of consolations, wishful thinking; and he deduced that the two quick moving lurkers must be comrades who had missed him, and had done some reasoning. Haji and Ximenes? Or, the Hong boys, with their shingling hatchets?

"This may turn out all right," Kane said to Bondoc, but he got no answer.

A rut in the road threw the three in a heap against the back of the cab. The touch of metal against wrist and handcuff made Kane grope. All he got was a crucifix and the beads of a rosary. "Mine," Bondoc said, reaching with his free hand.

He knelt. Kane yielded his shackled wrist a little, so that Bondoc could have a free hand with his beads. Pilapil, who had been cursing bitterly, became silent, hitched about, so that

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now the three were forehead to forehead, shoulder to shoulder, jouncing and pitching until the truck reached the paving of Highway Three.

"I have nothing for praying," Pilapil said, when Bondoc had finished, "and this is a time for it. One of your goodness, may I?"

"With my blessing."

Dawn was near. Kane could taste it in the air, hear it in the forest that came so close to the east shoulder of the highway; a breeze stirred the cogon grass on the other side. He could see the faces of his fellow prisoners. When the truck reached Kalasungai, the smoke of cooking fires scented the breeze, and the billowing mist which was almost a rain. It was cold. Pilapil's teeth chattered as he fumbled the beads.

Finally, he tugged to get some freedom of the right hand, and getting it, he crossed himself. Then he offered Kane the rosary, at the same time saying to the owner, "With your permission."

But Kane was self-conscious about devotions, and his, moreover, was another faith. While he had the urge to accept, just to be courteously appreciative, he revolted against acceptance simply as a formality. So he said, "Thank you, when a man prays at such an odd hour, he thinks there's no hope. As far as I am concerned, I don't know yet that it's so bad."

Like Haji, and those other Moslem fatalists, Kane rebelled against begging for favors; do your praying when you aren't on the spot. Pilapil eyed him, curiously, pointedly, whereas Bondoc nodded, as if fully understanding the difference in viewpoint.

Until the truck left the highway, to waddle down a cart trail which led into the eastern hills, Pilapil continued to regard Kane from the corner of his eye. He was thinking.

A narrow band of cogon, and then, the tall, straight *lauan* trees, some of them five feet in diameter, and reaching up ninety feet and more. And there were *molave* trees, short and crooked, with fluted boles, the hardest, heaviest wood in the island, and fully as good as Burma teak. Low mist rolled through the undergrowth of ferns, and rattan, but Kane's attention centered on the road rather than on the forest.

"Too much traffic for a graveyard," he remarked.

They gave him somber looks, as though they knew that their destination was little better than they'd at first estimated.

After a few kilometers of jouncing about, Kane heard the whine of a saw, and the chuff-chuff-hiss of a steam engine, one with journals which thumped and pounded sadly. Far off, there was a growing surging *swoosh*, followed by a long, ripping crash.

"We're in the lumber business, *amigos*."

Pilapil's mouth opened, rounded, but made no sound. If understanding had come to him, he was keeping it to himself; whatever it was, it had not made him happy.

Then, nearing a barbed wire compound guarded by rifle-armed men in khaki, Bondoc said to Pilapil, "I am afraid they will not tell Maximina where you have gone."

Bondoc seemed more content. Had his visits to Datu Ryan been known, they'd not be taking him to any logging camp.

The guards opened the gate, and admitted the truck, after no more than a "*Qué tal?*" for the driver. Ahead of him, Kane saw the brush shacks of the laborers, and beyond the compound, there was the sawmill, and stacks of lumber, and several sheds, as well as an office building.

Guards took off the handcuffs. There was no taking of names, no bothering with records. "Get down, quick about it!" Then, to a Filipino foreman, "Here you are, Miguel."

CHAPTER IV

REALIST AND QUISLING

THE mill, Kane learned as he joined the ragged, hungry-looking laborer gang, was a jerry built affair, probably set up to produce lumber for bridges and buildings of the interior. Normally, mills were all on the coast, except for one of Silik, on the broad Rio Grande de Mindanao; export lumber was produced as closely as possible to seaports.

No tractors, and no need for them, with so much slave labor. Kane, set to work with a bill hook, slashing a runway through the underbrush, watched a gang of men who dragged a log along on rollers. Yells and whip cuts drove them on. Labor was cheaper than carabao power, and there were enough shotgun guards to discourage any of the draft animals from going for a one-way walk.

Peaceful Bukidnons . . . hungry Bukidnons. Unless they had someone behind them with a whip, the poor devils would not have ambition enough to run out. As for the newcomers, they were kept together, so that one man could cover them.

Escape, Kane told himself that night, as he dipped into a pot of thin, peppery stew which served half a dozen men, should not be too difficult. However, making a break and returning to Ryan's camp was not stirring up mutiny in Malaybalay; and for a fugitive to return to the capital and carry on would be quite impossible. Urbano Tabinga would be alarmed into total uselessness by the disappearance of guerrilla and chauffeur, so that even if Kane returned and found refuge, he'd accomplish little but to jeopardize the governor.

Bondoc and Pilapil complained bitterly about

the food. Kane snorted. "This isn't luxury, but one could do worse."

His companions were amazed at such a quip, and even more so when, in an off-guard moment, he grumbled about the stench and filth of the encampment.

Datu Ryan, for all his eccentricities, was still a soldier, and during three years of the most rugged campaigning, he and Ximenes had insisted on camp sanitation, army style, so that to Kane and the Moros it had become second nature.

Bondoc was otherwise stoical about his captivity, but Pilapil was ready to blow his top. Without putting it in so many words, he felt that his two associates in captivity were responsible for his predicament, or so Kane thought until, on the evening of the second day of brush whacking, the full truth came out.

They had scraped the last bit of gumbo from the grimy earthenware pot. The three remained in a huddle near their shelter, mainly because the other prisoners were too far gone in misery and sullen despair for sociability. It was almost dark; fireflies were lacing the gloom, and hardly a trace of afterglow reached from the cogon prairie into the stand of *lauans.*

The redness of the remaining light seemed to concentrate in Pilapil's eyes, which was odd, since he faced eastward, while Kane looked west. The mechanic snarled, "How you like some of your own medicine you American? How you like, for a change, getting kicked around? God damn, how you like?"

He poured it out in English; low-voiced, sputtering, shaking with fury and sour triumph, he assailed Kane. Bondoc jerked as though stabbed. He clawed for the little pot and would have smashed it into Pilapil's face. *"Puta'ng-na-mo!* What is this, Victor? Shut up!"

Bondoc, as Kane saw it, had his neck on the chopping block, for while he did not know why he had been arrested, it would be fatal to have it known that he had been in the company of an American. Kane thrust the chauffeur aside, feigning ignorance, asked Pilapil, "What do you say? I do not understand. What talk is this?"

"You understand, you ——! You American ——! This is good for you. Now you know how it is in the States, for a Filipino."

"Don't be a fool! Shut up, we'll get out of this." Kane, seeing that his effort toward calmness was bringing Pilapil back to his senses, pressed his advantage. "Maybe you weren't handled quite the way you should have been. But if you kept your nose clean, you weren't herded around and slugged. Judging from your sign, you got out of the lettuce fields at Salinas and became a mechanic and came home to be a big shot. If you don't like it at home, is it my fault?"

"Because there was no chance in California," Pilapil said, soberly. "I worked. I studied. But who hires a Filipino, except for a house boy, or a creep in the fields? You ever been in Alviso?"

"Yes, lousy little dump."

"All right. Ten years I work, but you don't make me a citizen; you make Germans and Italians and other enemies citizens, but not Filipinos. You are damn fools! You get the Japs sore, then you run out and let us face the music!"

Kane's mouth puckered as though he had taken a double dose of homemade quinine. "You and I can't settle this. I didn't make it; we're in the soup together, and maybe we'll get out of it. And look here, Victor, I'm getting the dirty end of the stick from you Filipinos, am I not? I had a chance to get out, but I stayed, because I liked you people."

"Sure, because we treat you nice. How you treat us?"

Kane had no answer for that, no answer short enough to keep things from developing into a conspicuous debating society. And Pilapil, having spoken his piece, crawled to his dirty heap of grass to sleep until dawn.

Bondoc had said not a word. As he turned to his bunk, Kane detained him, and whispered, "Keep your head."

"How long? The loud-mouthed fool!"

BONDOC'S question kept Kane awake a long time that night. Pilapil, having spent some years in the States, had quickly sensed that Kane was not a *mestizo*, and while he did not suspect him of being anything more than a drifter, a "sunshiner," who had thus far escaped internment, expressing that opinion at the right time would involve Bondoc, and finally, the governor.

As a matter of business, of self-preservation, of obligation to Ryan's guerrilla band and to Governor Tabinga, Kane pondered the handling of a situation which would become increasingly deadly as captivity and hardship upset Pilapil. To throttle the man in camp would only make things worse. To do so in the forest would be virtually impossible. Still, it might be done, despite the guard. His vigilance would presently relax. . .

But it might not be necessary. Better try for a break. Beat through the jungle to Malaybalay, get word to Urbano Tabinga, and then head for Ryan's camp, and cook up a new plan. He was glad there was such a logical answer, since he was unable to deny that however much Victor Pilapil was off the beam, the poor devil's grudge against Americans was far from unwarranted. Times had changed, and they were changing, yet a man who had rebelled against the California freeze-out, and had then come home, only to have all his efforts ruined, could hardly be expected to remain cool and objective.

Kane's decision made him relax, and rest well; he was glad that he had been able to reject the necessity of silent and weaponless liquidation of an innocent menace. It seemed now that his having even considered such a move was evidence that he himself had come close to blowing a head-gasket.

In the morning, as they were herded to work, Pilapil seemed more cheerful, almost resigned to imprisonment. Kane whispered, "We're getting out of this. Keep an eye on the guards, but keep your head. Watch close; we have to study this and do it quietly."

"That is understood," Pilapil said, and Bondoc nodded.

Mid-morning brought a break in the routine. A big car majestically and slowly picked its way along a logging trail. A broad, craggy-faced man in whites stepped out. A standard model Filipino followed, carrying a clip board, as though ready to make notes or tabulate data at his chief's command. The camp foreman hurried forward, lifted his hat and bowed ceremoniously. "*Buenos días, patrón.* What is your pleasure?"

"*Buenos días,* Miguel. *Qué tal?*"

A whip cracked, and laggards again stretched the traces; *lauan* logs inched forward on their rollers.

Kane and his fellow brush cutters risked a glance at the newcomers. The guard snapped, "Tend your affairs, you!" and booted Kane soundly.

Pilapil snarled, spat in the guard's face, then made a great bound. Bondoc yelled in terror. Kane whirled, and saw that the guard had also turned: a beautiful chance, grab him, snatch his gun, and here we are! Only, it was mid-morning, with forest darkness nine hours in the future.

"Halt!" the guard yelled, and leveled the shotgun.

But he couldn't fire, for Pilapil had come too close to the big car, the important-looking man, and the foreman. Pilapil yelled, "Señor Escobido! Wait! Listen to me!"

Miguel tripped him, deftly, then kicked him in the ribs, but Pilapil seemed not to feel it. He shouted, "See, that big man, he's an American! *Americano!*"

Angel Escobido jerked as from a shot. The guard, remembering business, had whipped about, once more facing Kane and Bondoc, and covering them. The big boss brushed Miguel aside. "What was that?" Escobido demanded.

Pilapil got to his feet, and pointed. "Turn me loose, *señor.* I deserve it, for telling you this. That is an *Americano.* I lived there ten years, I know their ways!"

Escobido's heavy face solidified. "Miguel," he said to the foreman, "this deserves looking into. Bring him here!"

"*Sí, señor!*" Then, "You, Jorge! Bring the big one over, and be careful with that gun!"

So Kane, hands raised, went to face Collaborationist Escobido.

A SQUARE meal, good brandy, and a good cigar—even before he got one out of the dispensary bottle with the airtight stopper, Kane knew that it would be good, for Angel Escobido's "pigtails" were kept aristocratically, with vanilla beans and old brandy as conditioners. These fragrances had melted into the richer bouquet of the finest Isabela leaf.

Kane, clean, well-fed, and wearing one of Escobido's suits, stretched comfortably; the suit was sufficiently oversize to permit a yawn of contentment as he faced his host. The collaborationist smiled to acknowledge this tribute to his wonder working. Then, "You do not ask why?"

Kane pinched the tip from the pigtail. "That poor devil of a Pilapil went crazy, you understand. Everything has been crazy, *señor.* I am crazy now, and it is nice."

The grub was, and so was the brandy; so also the barren, prison-like little cubicle in which they sat. As for the rest, Kane didn't know. All he could do was mask his suspicion, and his aching eagerness to find the catch in this fan-

tasy. Escobido sensed his concealed suspicion sufficiently to make him say, "I keep you locked up for your own good. Who are you?"

"Señor Fulano."

A snort, a wry grimace. "Come, come! This is no trick. You are not a sunshiner, and not a *mestizo*. I'd never have suspected you, but once Pilapil exploded, well, then! He's seen lots of Americans."

"Where's Pilapil?"

Escobido shrugged. "Working, doubtless, Señor Don Fulano *Americano*."

No use being stubborn; Escobido was no one's fool. And when one could be hanged without confession or evidence, what's an admission more or less? So Kane answered, "Very well, *señor*, I am Simon Barker. I got out of Manila, beat my way around the Visayas, came to Iligan, and when Sharp surrendered, I went into the hills in Lanao. Moros aren't bad people if you mind your own business and keep your hands off their women."

"And are lucky, also. That understands itself."

"Now that I've answered you, what's this about? Chicken and cigars, an old American custom, just before the execution."

"You have no faith in human nature!" Escobido poured more brandy. "I am a man of few words. A man of action, so to speak. A man honest with himself. In short, large-minded enough to look a fact in the eye, and know it for what it is."

There was an impressive pause, and Kane, getting into the spirit of things, broke into that gap. "In short, Don Angel, you are a realist, and you serve the God of Things as They Are."

"Ha! Just so. Now"—the big man leaned forward, made a persuasive gesture, lowered his resonant voice—"the Japs, they are what you call damn fools, no? As you say it in English, *they have lost the pants*. Of course they have, and so will every smart man who made the mistake with them, even I. I am frank with you, I also made mistakes, but I do not make *banzai* charges. You, whatever you are, made a mistake, and as for your pants, they are lost—unless you join me."

"You are too kind, Don Angel."

"No, I am smart, realistic. We save each other's pants. Otherwise why do I take you from your work? For fun?"

"Mmmm . . . you are not a trifler, Don Angel."

"No. The guerrillas have taken in hand nearly all the Misamis coast. It is not safe for a Christian to poke his nose within ten miles of Macajalar Bay. They have a black list of *ricos* they dislike, of *políticos* they owe a grudge. But you will tell them, 'this is my friend, this is my benefactor; he saved me from death . . .'" The resonant voice thinned to a whisper. "And save you I did, *amigo*. Had I not been there,

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what would Miguel have done but call the secret police, Proceso Ligot's men."

"Ligot? The name is familiar," Kane admitted, feigning hazy recollection. "I have heard of him. So I am to give you a good character with the guerrillas. But why go to Macajalar Bay and gutted Cagayan de Misamis?"

"My friend, I trust you to the death. I trust you because without me, you have lost your pants. I have a PT boat, one the Japs riddled a little. I raised it, overhauled it, and I am going to China in it. You see? You are received by your army; you say, 'Angel Escobido, that man among men, he saved me, he loves Americans.' Which I do, in the way that the good God loves fools, begging pardon of your presence, you are an exception."

"You've done a lot for me, Don Angel. In spite of the barred window and the locked door."

"Ah! You wish to go for a walk? Walk, freely!" He got up, bowed ceremoniously, reached for the doorknob. "Freely! But you do not like to. No. And could you walk to Macajalar to join your Americans and American-loving guerrillas? With sixty miles of highway patrolled by the Japs? Again, no! But you ride with Angel Escobido, like a gentleman. Smoking a cigar. Not bowing to sentries. They will stop even my car, and then they will see me, and I will say 'I go on essential industrial business. Must you delay me?' And they will not delay us. Now is it clear?"

Kane got up. "I have met smart men. Me, I am one myself, being alive three years after Corregidor fell. But I admire you, a smarter man. Don Angel, this interests me. Have you high octane gas for that PT boat?"

"I also have lived three years since Corregidor, and, begging your pardon, better than you have, Don Fulano."

That spoke for itself.

They exchanged bows at the door. Escobido stepped into the passageway, and locked the door after him.

The lumber king had forgotten the cigars and the brandy which a *muchacho* had brought in after him. These were not the sort of things which one expends carelessly, not after three years of blockade. In other words, he was excited and exultant. That is, Angel Escobido had been on the spot until he had by accident acquired a safeguard for the final and deadly ten-mile stretch of Highway Number Three.

Kane was human enough to be tempted, but like his host, he was a realist. The guerrillas had destroyed, terrorized, raised pluperfect hell, yet for all the Army cooperation, they did not truly control the Misamis Coast; they merely kept the Japs from controlling it, which was not quite the same thing.

Kane, had he been so minded, could have made a deal with the liaison officer Ryan had insulted so grossly by telling him the most appropriate use to make of captain's bars. Why run out now? He shook his head, knocked the long, white ash from the "pigtail," poured himself some brandy. He said, almost audibly, "To hell with Ryan! I'm starting a mutiny."

With that decision, he made a routine inspection of his cell, to size up the chances of an escape which his host assumed not even the craziest American would dream of attempting.

While Escobido had no reason to believe that "Don Fulano" was remotely interested in escape, a man who has prowled for three years posing as a *mestizo* might have friends, might have womenfolk, might have this and that to upset his cold, clear logic. The man undoubtedly had a fatalistic, reckless streak in him, else he could not have succeeded; and such a streak, invariably compounded with a willful urge to follow the moment's whimsy, might set "Don Fulano" to prowling, to get the air for the air's sake, to have another word with a *lavandera* and get her mind off her laundry, for instance.

Just enough to get into serious trouble; just long enough to deprive Don Angel of a valuable piece of property, the one thing he needed to make certain a plan which heretofore had been only moderately sure. So, keep the crack brain in custody . . .

THIS was a comforting notion to Don Angel as he went into the *sala* to meet the visitor his Number One had announced. He regretted the brandy and the cigars, but the conversation had so developed that an exit was demanded and a gentleman can't walk out with a bottle in one hand, and a jar in the other. Escobido had given exits a great deal of thought ever since the first bombing of Palau.

He had not the faintest suspicion that his guest had been an eyewitness to that bombing, and had voluntarily come back to Mindanao to carry on, instead of continuing on his *prahu*-cruise to Tarawa, and a wife whose matrimonial status was almost entirely nominal.

So, Escobido and Nicolas Yerro exchanged bows in that spacious living room with translucent shell windowpanes. The bombing of the Mamala Barrio Airport had shattered all the glass.

"How is it with Victor Pilapil, Don Angel?" the mayor asked.

Escobido was a realist. "How is it with Pilapil's wife, Doña Maximina, Don Nicolas?" he retorted, and winked.

They both laughed. They were grown men, and understood each other, however much they disagreed on details.

The mayor seated himself at a table the top of which was of deep red *narra* wood, cunningly inlaid. Domestic sounds and cooking odors came from the rear. Señora Escobido was

screaming at a clumsy servant, and calling on all the saints to witness her woes. Thus far, she did not know that she was bound for Cagayan de Misamis, and then, China.

Escobido patted the Vernis Martín cabinet of the radio-phonograph; a shame, abandoning all these luxuries. Then, getting back to the opener, he answered, "Pilapil is going crazy."

"You think he knows?" The pinch-faced mayor was anxious, and plainly so. "What did he say? After all, when this is over—"

Escobido chuckled thunderously. "My poor Nicolas! You'd never imagine what he shrieked about when I saw him. For a second, I thought that idiot of a guard would cut loose with the shotgun, and spoil me and all the paint on my only car when Pilapil bolted."

"Holy Mother! *Bolted?*"

"To tell me that one of the prisoners"—Escobido enjoyed it too much not to laugh—"was an *Americano*. Some sunshiner who hadn't been rounded up until the other day. Imagine it! He thought he'd be turned loose for telling me I had an *Americano* and not a *mestizo* or a half-Arab Moro, or someone else of man's size."

Escobido was a smart man, except in this, that it is not wise to speak of stature to a weak-chinned person who, when barefooted and bald-headed, measures just five feet. But the mayor, short even by Oriental standards, concealed his long-swallowed hatred, and continued with his amiable smile.

"So! An *Americano*, rounded up! And why? Where?"

Escobido made a grand gesture. "Ask that buffalo-head of a Ligot. Hasn't he been around, howling about his suspect?"

"By no means. No one has cried, except"—the mayor giggled, and whisked out a purple handkerchief which had been drenched in purple-smelling perfume—"except Doña Maximina." He bunched his fingertips against his thumbs, kissed them, and with his left hand made a cutting gesture at the crook of his right elbow.

"And she wept. *Ai*, what a weeping! What questions! Was her husband's American experience held against him, at this late day?"

"She went away with no tears in her eyes? And smiling?"

"You are what Americans call high-pressure. It is clear also that you do not understand women. Not until tomorrow will she smile. Or maybe not until the day after."

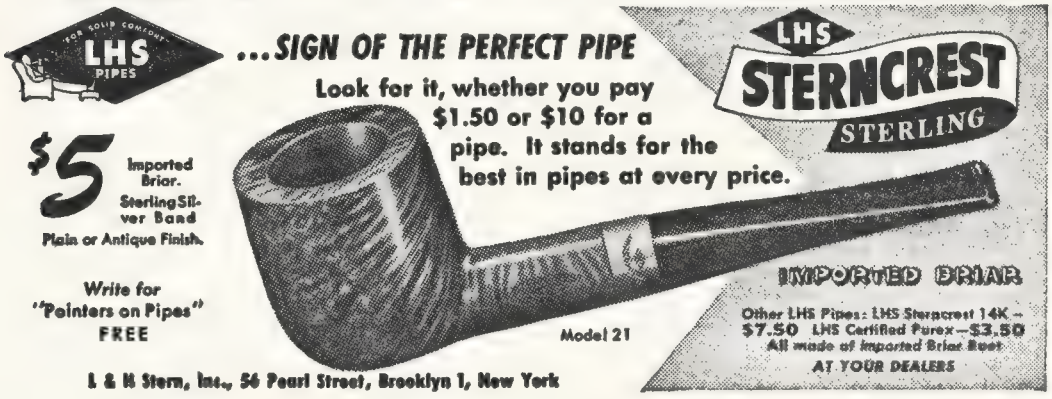
Escobido was too tactful to remark that small, pinch-faced men with not a drop of Spanish blood undoubtedly had to fritter away precious hours which a man-sized man could use more constructively. But the sweet-smelling little mayor had his intuitions, though he concealed these, and casually asked, "Now, this *Americano*, this sunshiner, how can this be? Has Proceso Ligot questioned him?"

"*Compadre*," Escobido answered in a whisper that vibrated with triumph, "that wooden fellow gets no such prize from me! You remember what I told you about going to China? Well . . . "

He explained the beautiful reciprocity arrangement which existed between him and "Don Fulano." The mayor listened, and admitted that blind luck had done more than headwork.

As a realist, and every Quisling is a realist according to his reckoning, the lumber king conceded the point; but he had to play up his triumph, for coincidence, the lucky break, the happy chance, are far greater evidence of one's basic rightness than any feat of skill, or strength, or intellect. Luck comes from Allah, as Haji always asserted, and an unlucky man was basically evil, whereas a lucky one, he was the beloved of God. So Escobido boasted, "Now, Nicolas *mío*, you see what I mean? The one bad spot of a beautiful plan, and how it has been made the best spot! Come with me, with us. I will share this *Americano* with you; we are partners, you and I."

Yerro's eyes gleamed. He hitched to the edge of his chair. He closed his eyes. Then, a deep breath. "No, Angel *mío*, I love my native coun-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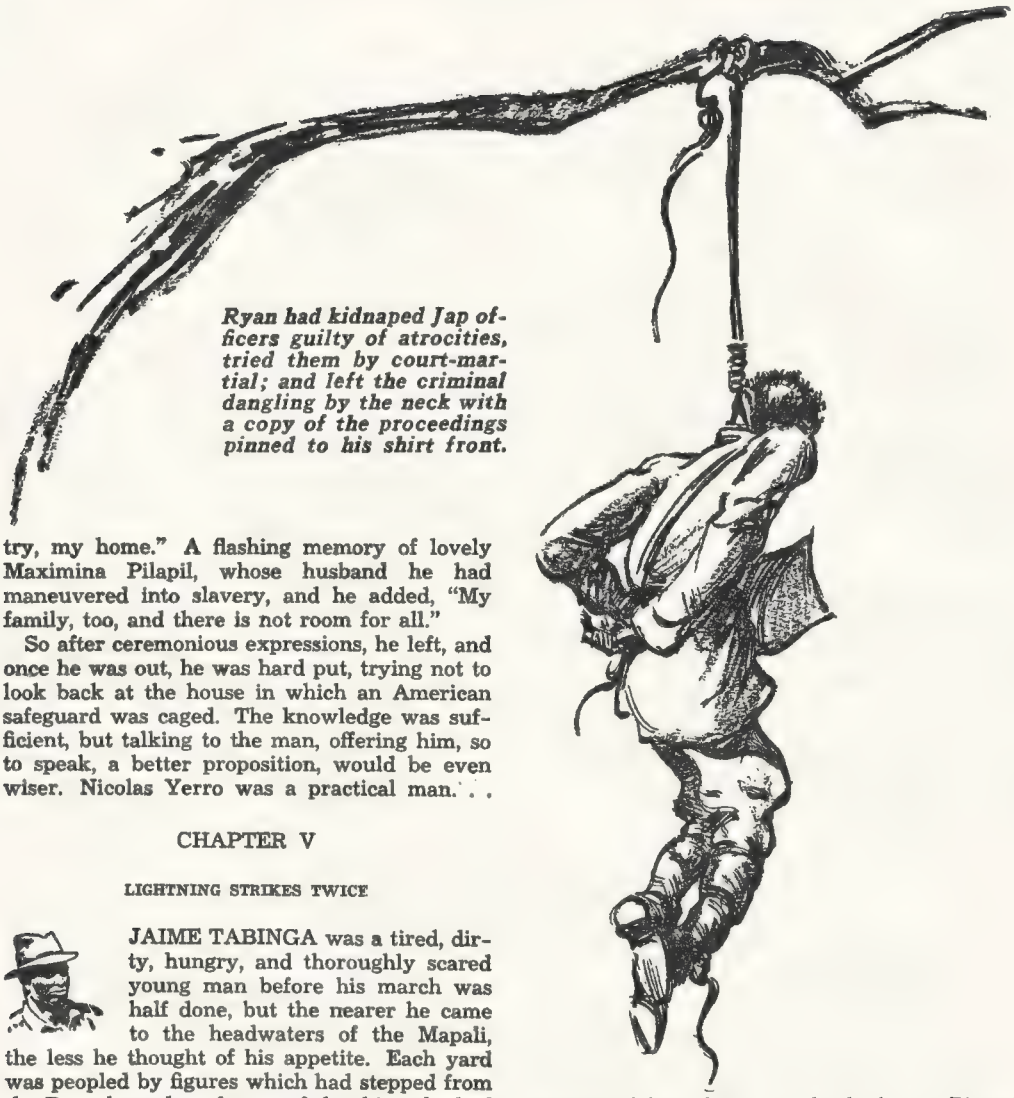


Ryan had kidnaped Jap officers guilty of atrocities, tried them by court-martial; and left the criminal dangling by the neck with a copy of the proceedings pinned to his shirt front.

try, my home." A flashing memory of lovely Maximina Pilapil, whose husband he had maneuvered into slavery, and he added, "My family, too, and there is not room for all."

So after ceremonious expressions, he left, and once he was out, he was hard put, trying not to look back at the house in which an American safeguard was caged. The knowledge was sufficient, but talking to the man, offering him, so to speak, a better proposition, would be even wiser. Nicolas Yerro was a practical man. . .

CHAPTER V

LIGHTNING STRIKES TWICE

JAIME TABINGA was a tired, dirty, hungry, and thoroughly scared young man before his march was half done, but the nearer he came to the headwaters of the Mapali, the less he thought of his appetite. Each yard was peopled by figures which had stepped from the Ryan legend; and most of the things he had heard were much more fact than fancy.

Ryan had kidnaped Japanese officers guilty of atrocities, tried them by court-martial, and after passing sentence, he executed it; left the criminal at the crossroads, dangling by the neck, and with a copy of the proceedings pinned to his shirt front.

Ryan made raids into Davao, hanging Japanese hemp growers with their own product; these he considered spies and saboteurs.

Once, when a punitive expedition had machine-gunned every inhabitant of a small *barrio*, by way of reprisal for a hot-headed native's knife work, it leaked out that they had picked the wrong village.

Within ten days, a colonel had been found in the plaza of Parang. He looked as if he had committed hara kiri. But he had not. Pinned to the body was a note bearing the date-line of the obliterated village; the message read, *Opened by mistake.*

Jaime Tabinga did not like the idea of trying to trap a man of Datu Ryan's ferocious humor. Young Tabinga, however, had character and courage. For his father and for the New Order, he had to carry through. He had to prove himself worthy of the confidence of Aunt Basilia's husband, Don Proceso. Though Aunt Basilia had been little less than a mother to Jaime, he had never been able to think of her husband as "Uncle Proceso," for the commissioner was less a man than he was an austere principle, a force, a powerful abstraction.

Jaime feared Datu Ryan's murderous whimsies less than he feared Proceso Ligot's con-

tempt. Even had his father not been in danger, Jaime Tabinga would have obeyed, but now, as he looked back, wistfully, despairingly, down over the wooded foothills, and across the broad valley whose billowing cogon stretches twinkled in the low sun, he felt terribly alone and helpless. Marayon Barrio was behind him, and Sagayon was not far ahead. The peak of Kalatungan jutted up, foreboding, a sterile volcanic domain.

What he dreaded most was the first moment of encounter. The guerrillas might open on him by mistake. They might consider him too unimportant for the madman's eye. For hours, now, he had felt the biting stare of unseen lurkers. Then, just as he was beginning to thank the saints that no one had challenged him, just as he had begun to brighten from the hope that alarm had driven the guerrillas so far away that he could not be expected to make contact, it happened.

There was no warning. He had looked up, bent into the climb up the empty trail, then again raised his head, and saw the gigantic black man who filled the path. In one hand he had a *kampilan* such as no island swordsman had ever lifted. It glowed and twinkled in the dipping sun, and the glow made it monstrous. It was like that stained glass window in the church, depicting the angel with the flaming sword that barred Adam from paradise.

But this was the black angel of death, holding a blade that pulsed and throbbed like living flame, a sword that seemed fully as long as Jaime himself. He had heard of the Black Bishop. Who had not? But few beside the furtive pagans had ever seen him, and here he towered, prodigious, gleaming purple black, something that might have grown out of the volcano itself.

Jaime could neither retreat, nor collapse, nor breathe.

The black man's voice was like the deeper notes of an organ. "Young man, you are a stranger, you are lost," the Bishop said in Spanish that sounded different from any that ever passed Filipino lips. "Let me help you."

New Order discipline, courage, austerity, ideals, all these, and that deep, calm voice restored Jaime Tabinga.

"I have a message for General Datu Ryan. I am alone."

"We have known for four hours that you come alone. Follow me."

He turned his broad back, and measured his stride to fit the plainsman's short legs. Later, after they left the main trail, and took one which zigzagged toward Kalatungan's crest, the Bishop saw that Jaime was fagged out. Without word or warning, he scooped the young man up as though he had been a rag doll, and shouldered him. Then, stride lengthening mightily, he began to sing.

Far up the slope, voices answered.

The first Jaime saw of the *sitio* was the rocky shelf on which Ryan had spotted his headquarters; the trees, though stunted at that elevation, were nevertheless tall enough to conceal the settlement from aerial observers. Then, howls of laughter, and Jaime was whisked in an arc, and set on his feet to face a man with four stars on each shoulder; a man booted and spurred, a man whose jaw and nose might have been hewn from Kalatungan's lava crags, sharp-featured, biting-eyed, and smiling only with his mouth.

"GENERAL, suh, this young gen'lman says he come with a message for you."

Jaime understood enough English to pick it up there. The shock of being set right side up, just a yard from Ryan, had numbed him too much to allow embarrassment at his entry into the presence; he had, indeed, been entranced ever since his encounter with the Bishop. Yet Proceso's indoctrination had not been wasted, and Jaime bore himself with dignity, despite the sweat which trickled in big drops down his cheeks.

"I speak a little English, sir. My father, Don Urbano, he trusts me with a confidential message. It is urgency. Eugenio Bondoc is not able to come according to ancient custom."

"Mmmmm. What's wrong with Bondoc? Hope he isn't sick?"

"Oh, no, sir. He is in jail. For minor infraction."

Ryan's left eyebrow rose, and with his hand he made a short, slicing gesture somewhat under his chin. "So?"

"Sir, I do not know. No one knows." The boy's natural terror gave force to the lie, and hid the liar's agitation. "My father is in danger, we fear."

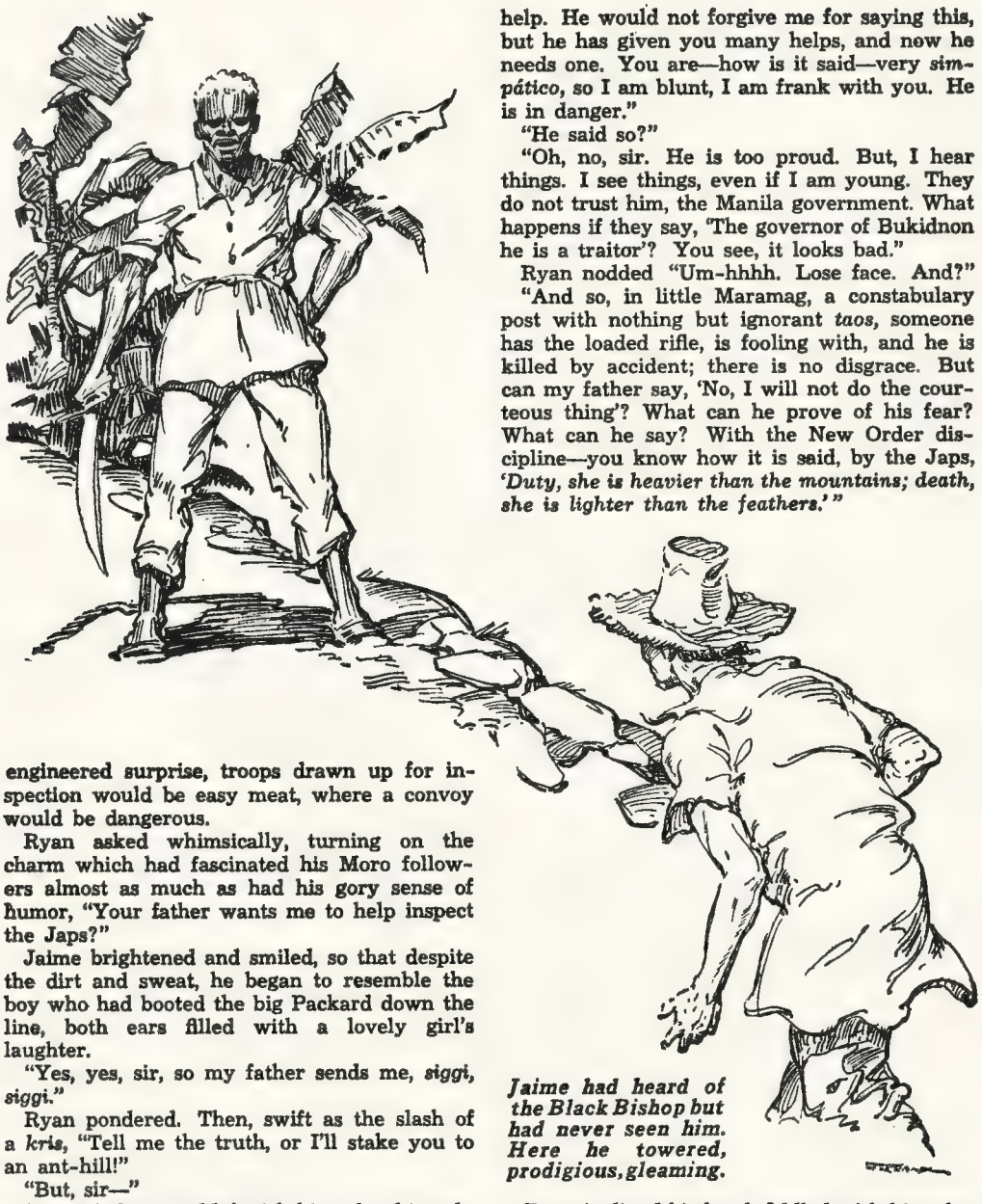
"Damn well right in fearing, son. Before he gets out of the *juzgado*, Bondoc'll tell everything, eh? And finish papa."

Jaime gaped. He hadn't thought of *that*. He'd had far too many other things to worry about. But he got back on the beam. "It may be so bad, sir. But this is it. My father is requested to be guest of honor at inspection of Japanese troops and P.I. constabulary at Maramag. A request to which he cannot say no."

"He's governor, isn't he? Or did the president order it?"

"Sir, you know who orders. Mr. Ligot, Commissioner of Public Safety. By making polite advisal."

Ryan's eyes began to gleam with a peculiar light. Maramag was in the bottom angle of Bukidnon, a wedge which separated Cotabato from Davao; it was densely-forested country, with a good approach, and a perfect getaway. With only a handful of cartridges, and a well-



Jaime had heard of the Black Bishop but had never seen him. Here he towered, prodigious, gleaming.

engineered surprise, troops drawn up for inspection would be easy meat, where a convoy would be dangerous.

Ryan asked whimsically, turning on the charm which had fascinated his Moro followers almost as much as had his gory sense of humor, "Your father wants me to help inspect the Japs?"

Jaime brightened and smiled, so that despite the dirt and sweat, he began to resemble the boy who had booted the big Packard down the line, both ears filled with a lovely girl's laughter.

"Yes, yes, sir, so my father sends me, *siggi, siggi.*"

Ryan pondered. Then, swift as the slash of a *kris*, "Tell me the truth, or I'll stake you to an ant-hill!"

"But, sir—"

"Your father wouldn't risk his only—his only—damn it, Bishop, what's the word?"

"His only begotten son, Gen'rul, and I beg you, do not be blasphemous unless you jest has to be."

"All right, Jaime!" The somber face brightened, winningly, so that the boy relaxed, convinced that he had only seen a madman's mannerism; he had heard of these dismaying shifts from fury to friendliness, for gossip travels.

Jaime said, "Sir, it is this way. My father is a proud man. He does not like to send for help. He would not forgive me for saying this, but he has given you many helps, and now he needs one. You are—how is it said—very *simpático*, so I am blunt, I am frank with you. He is in danger."

"He said so?"

"Oh, no, sir. He is too proud. But, I hear things. I see things, even if I am young. They do not trust him, the Manila government. What happens if they say, 'The governor of Bukidnon he is a traitor'? You see, it looks bad."

Ryan nodded "Um-hhhh. Lose face. And?"

"And so, in little Maramag, a constabulary post with nothing but ignorant *taos*, someone has the loaded rifle, is fooling with, and he is killed by accident; there is no disgrace. But can my father say, 'No, I will not do the courteous thing'? What can he prove of his fear? What can he say? With the New Order discipline—you know how it is said, by the Japs, *'Duty, she is heavier than the mountains; death, she is lighter than the feathers.'*"

Ryan inclined his head, fiddled with his saber chains. Tarhata, his third wife, offered him the silver betel nut box, but he brushed her hand aside. Then, abruptly: "Son, you have talked me into something. Your father has been a scholar and a Christian gentleman. We are almost out of ammunition, but around Maramag, there is a chance."

"General, I kiss your hands!" the boy cried, in Spanish.

Ryan clapped his hands, one-two-three. "Orderly! Get this gentleman some chow! Give

him a drink! Give him anything he needs, he is tired."

The orderly saluted, turned to Jaime, "Sir, this way—"

Then Ryan shouted, "Orderly! Stand fast! And sound 'boots and saddles.'"

The bugle blared. Men in ragged khaki, men in sarongs and turbans, men in *camisas de chino* came running out of the dusky depths of the stunted forest. And Jaime, trembling but happy, followed the orderly. Ryan wasn't so bad, after all . . .

Nothing to do but lag, to get lost, and so keep clear of the ambuscade at Maramag. Proceso Ligot was a man who knew how to do things. . .

NICOLAS YERRO was good and sick of hearing talk about little men. For a long time, he sat in his office, that night, thinking of the advantages of staying, and the hazards of running out.

They hadn't shot the Quislings in Leyte; they'd merely jailed them, for eventual trial, and witnesses could always be bought. Running out, moreover, would finish his prospect of ever being senator, or governor.

No doubt, he admitted, as he doodled with a gold-mounted Parker, his partner was smart in using a sottish *Americano* as a safeguard.

"Suppose I get that sunshiner to be my guest? This will give me a good character. I, the mayor, risked my life to protect an *Americano.*"

Clearly, Angel Escobido could not complain to the governor if Kane were "stolen." Yerro considered the details. "The loft in the municipal utilities buildings, it is large and comfortable," he mused. "I can do for him something which Angel can't do in his own house."

He drew a cubicle with barred window. "One grows lonesome." Then, he penned a spacious place, and sketched a man holding a woman, and a bottle. "*That* is what will make me a good character."

But he was filled to overflowing with remarks about little men. He frowned, contemplated other angles, and doodled curious patterns with a peso motif. Pesos! Simpler by far, than coddling an American. . .

Yerro sat down to a typewriter and set to work with a plain sheet of paper. Two-fingered, he pecked out a message, and when it was done, he said aloud, "That one with an improper love for his mother, he will find out how much big men count against smart men!"

The letter was addressed to Don Proceso Ligot, Commissioner of Public Safety.

In the morning, His Honor was back at his desk. His official duties, as he had expected, were presently interrupted by a clerk who came in, apologetically, to say, "*Señor,* that Pilapil woman, she demands to see you, and throwing her out, it would make a scene, highly embarrassing."

Yerro grimaced, yawned. "One must be humane, Pacifico. I will see her. How can I not?"

Maximina Pilapil, given the right clothes, could have been Carnival Queen in Manila with no competition. While the scarf which decorously covered her hair had seen better days and many of them, while her red shoes had long lost their shape, and her skirt was patched, everything she wore was faultlessly laundered. Her eyes, those magnificent Malay eyes, had a feverish gleam; yet Maximina, for all her worry and weariness, was lovely, and she carried herself with dignity.

After greetings, she asked, "Your Honor, is there no word?"

Yerro polished his glasses, shook his head sadly. "*Señora,* our police are so busy with political matters. He may have lost everything gambling, and is afraid to come home. Or, maybe he looks for a job more to his taste? Or—"

His Honor inclined his head, giving her permission to leave, but before she could pay her compliments, he added, "*Señora,* Victor's filling station and shop, they have long been closed. He may have borrowed, borrowed, borrowed too much. Those Chinos, they have no heart!"

"On what could he borrow? Everything's gone! The radio, the sewing machine, the *Americano* dishes, the two chairs, the picture—good God, everything! The poor boy was worrying, he was short-tempered. Is it possible—"

His Honor gestured, as if to repel the thought. "He could not be out planning robbery, no, not Victor! But he hates Americans. He may have enlisted in some constabulary company, well away, so you could not talk him out of it, because you'd not want him to do that."

She sighed. "He hates Americans. Then he's not run away to be a guerrilla, he's not—he's not in trouble with the secret police?"

"As to *that,* you might appeal to Don Proceso. What have I to do with public safety? I am only the mayor."

Fear showed in her eyes. However much her husband hated Americans, he also hated everything else, and in his despair, he might have cursed the New Order—nearly as fatal as cursing God.

Maximina shivered. "Oh, no! Asking him would do no good, none! Asking would make him think— Don't you see, I'd be in trouble then! He'd think my conscience was wrong, he'd hound me!"

"What do you do now?"

"Oh, I'm a *lavandera!*" She turned her palms up. "Isn't it plain enough!"

The skin was puckered from hours of immersion in river water.

"I have just the thing for you and Victor, when he comes back. A little place out near the airport; I need a caretaker and gardener. You two could handle it nicely. It's a sort of guest house, but guests are pretty scarce these days, and there's very little work."

A fresh start in life. Maximina snapped it up, and when he spoke of sending a cart to move her belongings, she laughed and told him she could carry those on her head.

The mayor's optimism was contagious. And wouldn't the women who had cackled at seeing a one-time businessman's wife reduced to toting laundry around on her head laugh another tune! When she left, Maximina looked better, and the little mayor admitted that it wasn't a bad world.

Then he settled down to doodling, and watching the clock, and looking out the window, even though it gave him no view of Angel Escobido's house, which should soon be raided by Constabulary looking for a hidden American.

Evening came, and there had been no raid. Yerro cursed the postoffice, and wrote another anonymous letter.

That same evening, Proceso Ligot conferred with a grizzled man who could hardly be other than a retired soldier or a splendid actor. He stood at attention, not stiffly, like a rookie, with easy posture that was nevertheless more military than any ramrod erectness.

"Bautista, the governor's inspection of constabulary can't be delayed very much, but after it is over, the men can be held in the plaza, waiting for transportation, and he can be detained there by local *políticos.*"

"*Sí, señor.*"

"Then, soldiers in ambuscade will let you know by short wave, so you'll be posted without any orderly to wonder what you're doing."

"But the ambush for Datu Ryan, *señor,* is it to be so close to Maramag? Close enough for a reasonable number of stray bullets?"

"I have planned for that. A platoon will be near Maramag—the reserve. They will start shooting when they hear the distant firing that is finishing Ryan. They'll shoot high, but they'll cause much excitement. And your *one* shot won't be conspicuous. Don't miss, Bautista!"

"I made expert five seasons running, *señor.* No matter how many men are around him, I'll get the governor, no one else. But, from my post, I can't cover the whole plaza. With permission, *señor*"—he pointed at a sketch map on the desk—"my field is only this part."

"I'll be with him, I'll direct him. Your shot will make the governor a hero, there will be no disgrace, no reflection on the republic's officials."

And now that the honor of the New Order and of his own family had been safeguarded, Proceso Ligot found time for letters which, already delayed in delivery, had yielded precedence to more important matters.

He knew from established precedent that these were largely anonymous, and could from experience recognize the disguised handwriting which people used for the secret denunciation of neighbors. Greater East Asia had brought in at least one blessing: instead of using the conspicuous *bolo* to liquidate a grudge, one had only to write a letter.

The typed letter had no return address. Typewriters were not numerous in Malabalay. And as he read that Angel Escobido was harboring an American—"*doubtless a guerrilla or spy*"—Ligot reviewed the list of possible authors. . .

AFTER Escobido left him, Kane examined the window bars. They were intended to discourage prowlers, and not to confine a determined prisoner. However, wrenching the bars loose from the wooden sash would be a noisy business, and while the house was solid enough, its structure made it a sounding board.

Although he could not catch a word, he did get the deep note of Escobido's voice, somewhere in the front, and the higher-pitched answer. In another part of the house, the family was active, and for a while, servants chattered and laughed.

The door, while far from flimsy, was not a formidable barrier, but crashing it would be too noisy.

There was not much oil left in the earthenware bowl which served as a lamp. However, the bottle of brandy helped; a good use for the stuff had come to him. His room had a bare floor, but the hall was carpeted with woven grass matting.

Kane's plan was simple: pour the brandy at the threshold, so that it'd flow under the door and soak the matting in the hall. Touch it off, and as smoke panicked the family, smash the door; the Escobidos, scurrying about, knocking things around, would furnish the curtain of sound which he needed.

As for the next move, Kane had that figured out. The time for pussyfooting was over. He took the bottle and the oil dip, and squatted at the door. At least a third of the liquor had been paid out when he heard the soft shuffle of sandals. Someone was in a hurry.

The footfalls stopped at the door. A key grated. Kane gritted his teeth, and stepped back. The liquor already poured would soon evaporate.

When the *muchacho* barged in breathlesly, Kane growled, "What do you mean? Don't you usually knock?"

"A thousand pardons, *señor!* I thought you'd be asleep."

Kane yanked the boy in, and closed the door. "But I'm awake. What is it?"

"The cigars, the brandy—*el patrón,* he wants them."

Kane became aware of the two cops just before they accosted him. In his most carefree manner, he greeted them with, "Identification? But yes, señores, with pleasure."

Kane grinned and waggled the bottle. "Not enough to bother with. Where is he?"

"In the library, *señor.*"

The servant was puzzled by the whole business, yet anyone with whom the boss drank and smoked certainly must be *gente muy fino,* and treated with courtesy.

"Alone?"

"*Sí, señor.* Is there a message?"

"Hmmm . . . this!"

He clipped him a cutting stroke with the edge of the hand. The boy went glassy-eyed, buckled, all ready to dive. Kane peeled off the fellow's pants, ripped them, and got to work tying and gagging. That done, he gutted the box of cigars, and thrust the brandy bottle into his side pocket. The sandals which had replaced his rawhide footgear made no sound.

It was dark in the hall, except for a dim light in the vestibule, far ahead. Kane walked briskly along.

Escobido, planning his own escape, would not be too impatient about the servant's delayed return, and when he did begin to wonder, he'd send for another to hunt the first one. Kane stopped in the vestibule when he saw the hat and the hardwood cane. He took both, and made a deliberate exit.

As he reached the foot of the front steps, he heard a handclap, and a deep voice call, "Felipe, Felipe! I said, bring me the brandy. I didn't say drink it!"

Since Kane was wearing a white suit, there was only one way to move—boldly. He carried his stick with an air, and flourished his cigar. Though the town was blacked out, it contained many cat-eyed watchers.

He debated whether to go to the governor's front door, or whether to blend boldness with a touch of discretion. Deciding in favor of the latter, he headed for the market place, to pick up the way which led to Tabinga's back door.

Nearing the corner where he had made camp the first night in town, he paused to squint into the gloom, and to sniff the air. There was no smudge smell, nor any scent of a horse. Wherever the others were, they'd not be in jail; his own mishap would have been warning enough.

Then, halfway to his destination, he learned that lightning does strike twice in the same place. He became aware of the two cops just a moment before they accosted him. Cigar glowing, he halted, and in the most carefree manner, bade them good evening. He whipped his stick up, athwart his body, his left hand

caressing it lightly, his right getting a firm, yet flexible grip.

"Identification? But, yes, *señores,* with pleasure."

Arms akimbo, heads cocked after the lordly way of their kind, they waited for him to fumble and dig. Kane slashed with the stick, making a horizontal arc. It whipped, springy hardwood, smacking the nearest man's solar plexus; he couldn't say a word. It was not immediately apparent to the other that Kane had made any move, for there had seemingly been nothing but a peculiar, drum-like thump. While he could have gone for gun or truncheon, he did not, simply because of the peculiarity of the sound and his partner's failure to react.

Kane, on the other hand, continued in motion, and made the most of the other's delayed reaction. This time, the stick jabbed upward, somewhat like the short jab of the old-time bayonet manual. The iron-shod ferrule bit deep into the throat, just under the jaw, a deadly, paralyzing stab.

One man was permanently speechless. One was now able to struggle for breath. This, however, did not last long. An iron-ferruled stick, skillfully handled, is as good as a *bolo* or bludgeon.

When Kane left the two, he knew that neither would render a report. He had two pistols, and no qualms, for he was dealing with a police force which specialized in the slave trade.

Some minutes later, he was at the back door of the governor's palace, ready to cure Urbano Tabinga of sitting on the fence.

IT WAS a haggard and harassed man who came to receive Kane; Tabinga was shaky. This was plain, even before they sat down in the attic room, where Kane bluntly opened the show by saying, "*Señor,* so far we have played. Now it is time for business. There must be a mutiny by ten in the morning."

"Oh, God!" the governor groaned. "Wrapped up and delivered. That is all that I have been hearing now for two days!"

"*For two days?*"

"It seemed like two years! Yes. A wrinkled smiling little man with death in one eye, and a thousand devils in the other. A young man who is as bad. Day and night, I expect the secret police to search my house, to find them, those Satanic friends of yours!"

"Oh."

"Yes! They came in, they refused to leave. They said, 'Find our friend, or we, and others, we will do things to cast reflections on you. You will have to run to the hills. And do not phone, *señor;* the others will get to work if anything is done to us.'"

"Haji and *el teniente* Ximenes," Kane said, smiling, "are men of crystallized character. Before God, they would do as they promised, and much more. Well, that leaves nothing for me to add, except that the hour is ten in the morning. Now that it is settled, let me apologize for my rudeness, Don Urbano. But things have been forced upon me."

"Where—how—you were jailed, of course. Holy Saints! And my chauffeur, Eugenio, what has that poor man not been made to confess against me? Where is he? How is it with him?"

"Don Urbano, let this be a sedative to you. Eugenio Bondoc is safe, overworked, and unquestioned. Where are Haji, Ximenes?"

"In another room, driving me to death!"

"I'll take them off your hands. You just have a review and inspection of the Home Guard and constabulary tomorrow at ten."

"Mother of God! I have to inspect the constabulary at Maramag tomorrow. In the afternoon."

"What's happening at Maramag? Call it off; it'll keep."

"But it won't! Proceso Ligot 'recommended' and he 'advised' for the moral effect."

"What moral effect?"

"My boy, Jaime, you know, he went to Maramag, to be storekeeper in the aviation supply, but there has been a change; he is to be commissioned in the constabulary. For moral effect, the governor's son was to work with his own hands—"

Kane, remembering the young chap in the big Packard was too tactful to say, "You mean, sit on his own rear end!" Instead, "And now he's an officer. With all respect, isn't that a bit sudden?"

"Yes. But you comprehend, if I, the governor, have a son in the constabulary, it stimulates recruiting, it is an example, it fosters loyalty. Don Proceso told me."

"But it'd be even better if Jaime were a private. Eating common constable's rations and so on."

Don Urbano bounced up from his chair. "That would be more dramatic. The voters would like it better, too." He looked happier. "I must tell Don Proceso . . . " He frowned. "But, no! One does not have an inspection and a parade for a private. He must be given a commission."

"Look here, Don Urbano! You can get to Maramag in time, and if you're late—hell, man! There's going to be a mutiny in Malaybalay. That's a first-rate excuse for missing parade!"

"But, but the humiliation—mutiny, in my own city, when my son, Jaime—"

"Listen, would they claim *you* started a mutiny to keep your own son from being the bright spot in a ceremony to buck up public morale?"

"*Señor,* be reasonable. Why can't we have the mutiny the day after tomorrow? I beg of

you, do not make my boy a hoodoo, whose commission is coincidental with disgraceful conduct of his fellow officers."

"We can't postpone the mutiny. I have just killed two cops on my way over here, and I didn't know where to put the corpses, so—"

Kane stopped.

Urbano Tabinga was as near fainting as a man can be without crumpling up like a dirty towel. "You killed—two policemen—yourself . . . "

Kane shrugged. "No time to call for help. Christ, I've killed as many as three men at one whoop, myself."

"But how can *I* make a mutiny?" the poor man screamed.

"Just have a parade, I'll do the rest."

"Those corpses! Mother of God, when they're found—"

Kane jabbed Tabinga's sweat-soaked shirt with his index finger. "Give me your keys. I want your car—everyone knows it, we won't be stopped. I'll dispose of the stiffs before they're missed, I'll get Ximenes and Haji out of your house, I'll make them behave like Christians, I'll do anything within reason, but if you do not cook up some excuse for having a parade and inspection tomorrow at ten, I shall not be responsible for anything."

A portentous pause. Kane hardened himself to resist the little *político's* pleading. "*Señor*, I shall have Datu Ryan bushwhack the constabulary at Maramag, right when they are drawn up at attention. How can I guarantee that they won't cut your son down among the others?"

Urbano Tabinga was too shaken to appreciate how impossible it was to make good that threat, for Datu Ryan's doings had for three years been such that nothing could be laughed off. He forgot that the guerrillas were tragically short of ammunition. He could see nothing but himself and his only son, cut down by howling men with long *kampilanes* and wavy-bladed *krisses*.

The governor said, "My friend, there is an inspection at ten. For the love of God, see that Proceso Ligot is killed. He is my own sister's husband, but he is not human; you cannot beg, you cannot bribe, he has no heart."

"He sounds like fair game. Now, your keys, and let Haji and Ximenes waltz out of their dens."

"Instantly, at once, immediately—anything to get those fiends out of my house!"

CHAPTER VI

MUTINY AT TEN

"I GOT the cops' pistols," Kane said, as they pulled up, a kilometer short of the camp. "Here, you—"

Haji said, solemnly, "*Señor*, I am ashamed, I told you one damn lie. I bring a few little things, in the charcoal."

He referred to three service automatics, two *krisses*, a pair of blackjacks, five hand grenades, six daggers, a small pinch bar, and wire cutters.

"You didn't bring a tank or a piano, did you?"

"Not with one little horse, *señor*."

The sentries at the slave camp were not to keep people from breaking in, but to keep them from getting out. The job was dreary routine, and not one to keep them on the alert.

Kane gave his five men the setup. "Remember, not a guard, clerk, or foreman is to get out alive. We can't take any chance on a warning getting to Malaybalay."

Each took his sector, and closed in. . .

Back in Malaybalay, Proceso Ligot sat up, stern and straight-mouthed, awaiting the results of the raid on Angel Escobido's place. . .

Angel Escobido was cursing the saints. That louse of an American, that ungrateful, that idiotic, that sunshiner, he had escaped. . .

Jaime Tabinga was getting his first taste of night marches. His eyes glazed, his feet were sore, and he was walking in his sleep. A gigantic man, black as the chilly mountain night, had him by one shoulder, holding him upright.

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Bishop Jackson thought of Daniel-Come-to-Judgment, and his black face became long and lugubrious. He was worrying about that horse. He would have prayed for him, except that it would disrespectful, asking God to guard a dumb animal, though Daniel-Come-to-Jedgment had more sense than most humans, and a temper nasty enough to be human.

As for Jaime, he didn't know where he was going, except that the trail descended, as every trail did, on the way to Maramag, and on the way to any other spot on Highway Three. . .

In the barbed wire stockade, Victor Pilapil lay awake, thinking of the ingratitude of man, and especially of Angel Escobido's. Give him a chance to turn in an American, and did he liberate the informer? Not that one!

Victor Pilapil was awake because of what Eugenio Bondoc had said to him after guards had booted Victor back to work, and hustled Kane into the big shiny car.

"You—you traitor, you informer, you eater of dung! You are lower than those; not even an *Americano* deserves to be sold out to one like that Escobido, that patriot getting rich on government contracts!"

The cold ferocity of Eugenio Bondoc had taken all the heart out of Pilapil, and so had the fact that the betrayal of a fellow captive had been useless. Pilapil had considered, reasonably enough, that betraying an enemy alien as a means of getting back home, was justified. Now, having failed, he saw it otherwise, and the seeing made his grief all the deeper. One couldn't, one shouldn't leave Maximina alone in the world. A good girl, but only human, and cast adrift, no telling what Maximina might do, in desperation and hopelessness. If she'd been homely, clumsy, stupid, pockmarked, or old—say twenty-five or -six—it wouldn't be so bad, but she was too lovely to be on the loose. . .

The *snick* of taut wire made him jerk up from his bundle of dirty grass. He relaxed. That hadn't been the cocking of a pistol. Eugenio Bondoc wouldn't have a pistol anyway. . .

Americans were dog-children, but they hadn't ever treated him the way his own countrymen had done. Escobido, the crooked police, the Jap-loving police, the Jap-loving mayor, they had done far worse. The dance hall girls in Alviso, back in California, they had robbed him, but they had looked the other way to sneer, and they had smiled while robbing him.

Yet he'd not been kicked. He'd been belittled, and once had been called a Jap. The *Americanos* had refused to hire him as a mechanic, but they hadn't been really insulting; they just wouldn't give him a chance to prove that he loved engines, and understood them.

Now that you think of it, Victor, the *ricos* and *políticos* of your own people have despised you as much as did the *Americanos*. They treated you worse—and worst of all, since the Japs came. The ignorant *Americano*, he was scornful because a Filipino is the size of a Jap, and somewhat the color of a Jap, and the *Americano* has always mistrusted the Jap, which showed good sense.

So, as he lay there, wisdom came to dilute his fear of the wrathful chauffeur. Not a bad man, this Bondoc. I'll talk to Bondoc, I'll tell him, then I'll have a friend.

And as Victor Pilapil went to beg pardon of a man to whom he wished to talk about the woe of being separated from a beautiful wife, there was another man, miles south, who was leaving an old and fat and grim-jawed wife, and going to the garage to get his Hudson sedan. Nicolas Yerro saw no reason for him not to go to his own guest house.

"After all," he told himself, "Maximina is to cook for my guests, so why can I not be my own guest?

"I am benevolent, I am her protector; it will cheer her up to serve breakfast to a man, and not to just one lone woman and an empty table. She is a sweet girl; she does not deserve being left adrift this way. . .

He had a bottle of Bols gin, and a jar of candy, all hoarded for three years. He hoped his wife would not miss those old earrings, and that bracelet, or those stockings. Maximina had none.

Ai, these accursed Japs! If one could only buy some of those American garments pictured in the magazine, the *Saturday Night Stake*. A silly name for a magazine, but such pictures!

With the escape of Kane, angel Escobido put on the mental pressure. "How was I going to handle the guerrillas of Macajalar Bay? You can't bribe them . . . hmmm . . . invite a couple Jap officers and turn them over to the guerrillas . . . Colonel Okubi, he won't take a bribe, but he is a pig for liquor . . . turn him over to the guerrillas, and until I get to the Misamis line, use him for a safeguard. *Ai*, what a chump I have been! That will be as good as an *Americano!*"

Just reverse the order of use.

All these men, each in his way, was going to meet the fate he had prepared for himself; Kane's doing were only the fuse for that which was waiting to be touched off. As for Kane, he knew only that he had another man to kill, and without any sound . . .

BEFORE dawn, Kane had shuttled back and forth between the prison camp, bringing load after load of slaves who could not have made the march; meanwhile, the stronger ones had beaten their way through the cogon, and when the sun came up they were all in place, out of sight, hungry, but with fury taking the place of food.

Some, carefully picked, had the guns which their late guards had not had a chance to fire. Others were armed with bill hooks, adzes, and whatever hand tools they had found to suit their various fancies. They had come from every *barrio* between Maramag and Del Monte Plantation, but they all had one idea in common.

It was easy for them to believe, and to do as they had been ordered. A group here, a group there, lying low in the cogon, and waiting for the music and the bugles, and the sound of the five grenades which Haji had brought, and which Kane had saved for the airport, not far from Nicolas Yerro's guest house.

Time bombs were what he should have had; time bombs were what he would have had, but for Datu Ryan's touchy pride, and his tactless handling of a liaison officer. But a guerrilla gets results with what he has.

Kane depended on Lieutenant Ximenes to handle the airport; a handful of ragged *taos* with shovels and picks could go almost anywhere, with a good spokesman. They'd be camouflage for Ximenes, who shouldered a bamboo rake, and carried the grenades.

The lieutenant had promised, "And I'll keep these fellows under cover till the time, if I have to *bolo* them to the last man!"

"Have no fear, *señor*," Victor Pilapil had told Kane. "What *el teniente* says, that is what I do."

Kane had whispered to Ximenes, just before going his way, "Watch that lad, he's about ready to blow his top. Slug him if he begins looking wild; he's worried about his Maximina."

The two Chinamen were in the big town. "Hell, no, keep the gats. We can't shoot for sour apples. How many times do I have to tell you?" Hong Li cracked off. "You don't miss with a hatchet."

"Hatchets," his brother said, "they satisfy. They're humane, too. No probing for bullets. No post-anesthesia sickness."

Kane, free at last to join his own detachment of liberated slaves, told himself that Datu Ryan, sitting atop Kalatungan's high peak, would see the smoke rising.

Meanwhile, the governor was having a tough morning with Proceso Ligot. "*Señor*," Tabinga said, and mopped his forehead, "I am, please remember, governor of Bukidnon. When public safety is concerned, Mr. Commissioner, I give you my ear. As for this, it is purely a local matter. There was a serious crime last night and the mayor has asked me to make a show of the police strength of the capital."

"You did not report to me?"

"Why should I?" For the first time, Tabinga was showing his teeth. "A municipal matter, not political."

"But in Maramag," Ligot protested.

"If we are delayed, we are delayed! If you object, Mr. Commissioner, make a written report. Doubtless you will be given respectful hearing!"

It was with difficulty that Ligot refrained from yelling, "If it weren't for the honor of the family, I'd have you in irons right now; I'd have you facing a firing squad!" Instead, he got up, and bowed, rigidly and formally.

He had spent a bad night. His raid on Angel Escobido's house had been a bad move. A perfect surprise, yet not a trace of evidence to sustain the anonymous charges. He had by now a suspicion as to the author: Escobido's partner, a fine and loyal man, undoubtedly acting in all good faith. Private questioning, tactful questioning, by Ligot himself, might uncover a fresh lead and a good one. Yet it would be ticklish work, getting Yerro to voice his suspicion.

"*Señor*," the governor was saying, "you will honor the ceremony with your presence?"

"I regret to say that urgent business prevents."

And then the mayor came in, all breathless. "*Ai*, what a day—some properties to inspect, and then to get here in time, but I am here, Don Urbano!"

Triple threat bowing, and then Ligot went out, almost stamping. "He seems displeased," Yerro observed, and stroked his chin. "Possibly he is tired. A very busy man."

Basilia Ligot, the governor's sister, knelt in her room. Before her she had the image of her

Basilia Ligot, the governor's sister, knelt before the image of her patron saint. "Let everything go well for only a few more hours and Urbano will be safe from disgrace and Jaime out of danger . . ."

patron saint, two hoarded candles, and an alarm clock; in her fine, small hands, a rosary. A handsome, middle-aged woman, with only a trifling sag at the chin; a bit plump, but not too much so. Not a trace of gray in her gleaming hair, and despite the cosmetic shortage, her face was a pleasant, golden-cream color, instead of the muddy sallowness one would expect her years to have brought her.

A fine figure of a woman, this Basilia Ligot, and the glow of gratitude which lighted her eyes and face made her something splendid to see. "Only a few hours, let everything go well for only a few more hours, and Urbano will be safe from disgrace, and Jaime out of danger. . ."

She readjusted her lace mantilla, inclined her head, and after a final glance at the clock, she resumed prayers for that which she had for a moment considered as almost accomplished. Aunt Basilia had overheard all but one detail —the one which her husband and that expert rifleman, Bautista, had planned—so she prayed for Jaime's safety, Ryan's damnation, and her brother's continued favor with the New Order. She loved a parade, but what would the saints think if she got off her knees before the issue had been decided?

Maximina Pilapil, standing on the porch of Yerro's guest house, looked up the road along which, only a few minutes earlier, Yerro had hurried to the city. "That scoundrel," she said, and grimaced. "That traitor!"

But the house was magnificent, and the furnishings like nothing she had ever imagined. Worth her while, keeping that undersized stinker in his place. She sighed, thinking of Victor. She looked toward the airport, and sadly shook her head. "Now those ragged fellows, those poor devils, they're near home, at least. Even such a job would be lovely!"

She saw a stirring in the cogon grass; it moved perceptibly against the wind. On the airfield, ragged *taos* straggled along with brooms and rakes and shovels. Maximina wondered, and did not quite know why, what made those distant men and that odd, nearby stirring in the grass hold her attention. Then she forgot her indignation at Yerro, and her curiosity. She was now hearing the bugles, and the music. Too bad she couldn't go to watch the doings in town, only a little more than a mile away.

BUGLES made a brave and martial sound that morning. The Home Guard, solid farmers and laborers, formed in the plaza. Though newly organized, and hardly accustomed to uniform, they nevertheless made a good showing, for the Filipino has a respect for soldiering, and a love of it, so that he learns quickly, and takes a pride in his learning. The Japs had counted on the feeling that a man gained dignity by bearing arms; that, and propaganda about the defense of newly won independence. Men who had little information, and that bit doctored, were to uphold the setting sun in Mindanao, while the Japs went to Leyte.

Then came the constabulary company, and by contrast, they made louts of the Home Guard. Mutiny to order was a stiff contract.

The governor and his staff came from the palace. The mayor and municipal dignitaries were waiting for him. Another bray of bugles, shouted commands, and the official party went to begin the inspection. True to his word, Proceso Ligot had stayed away.

Several Japanese field officers who had come from the airport strutted along. They gave the governor precedence, so that he would gain additional face, which would give dignity to the puppet government, and put Nippon in the light of an Elder Brother.

Haji saw all this, and passed the word back to Kane and his portion of the mob of liberated slaves, who waited in the high cogon outside one of the small *barrios* which girdled the capital.

Kane wondered how Ximenes was faring at the airport. The field music was to have been the lieutenant's signal. He was as tense and shaky as any rookie going into action for the first time.

Finally he got word, and turned to say to the men lying behind him, "Now!"

Kane got up, and strolled forward. He carried Escobido's ebony stick, he wore Escobido's fine hat, and smoked one of the slave driver's cigars. The slaves followed him, silently, as he had ordered.

"Open ranks . . . ho!"

That came, clear and crisp.

The timing was good.

Kane, whose senses were now unnaturally sharp, heard a sequence of rumbling sounds from west of the highway. Ximenes, then, was mopping up the airport.

Kane's men infiltrated through the crowd of spectators which jammed the edges of the plaza, the steps of the church and the *comandancia.* As he broke through, people muttered at his rudeness. The governor and his entourage were walking down the line of Home Guards.

Marching order: full packs, emergency rations, and a hundred rounds of ammunition. Very simple, Kane, provided the guards act as you've figured they should.

He stepped boldly into a square which was now sacred to the armed forces of the Philippine Republic, and to the Son of Heaven. A policeman fiercely ordered him back, and gestured with his truncheon, but Kane kept walking, toying with stick and cigar. Five paces into forbidden territory, he faced smartly about to look at the front rank of outraged spectators, and the two cops who were heading for him.

He shouted, like an adjutant at parade, *"Pass in review!"* He bawled it, long drawn out, full-throated, deep-chested, as Datu Ryan might have. The sound echoed from the buildings which enclosed the plaza. The effrontery of the man made the cops pull up, and blink.

"March!"

The slaves passed in review. Breaking from among the spectators, they straggled in a crooked line, the length of the square. Verminous, grimy, ragged almost to nakedness; their long hair was caked with grease and grime and burrs. Arms dangling, legs buckling, this company of the damned began the review which mocked the smart formation at the head of the square.

Although the men in ranks kept their faces to the front, their eyes darted all over, and the soldierly faces showed unmilitary changes of expression. Laborers and farmers recognized missing friends and relatives.

The two Jap officers had wheeled. Sudden bombing, sudden machine-gunning, they knew how to act under those conditions, but this, this was something that could not happen, a very abortion of nature.

Then something which was not according to plan broke Kane's routine. From the further flank of the square, Victor Pilapil burst from the crowd. He had quit his proper detachment, and was no longer a shambling zombie.

Pilapil ran in great bounds, and for all his unhuman speed and agility, he still had breath for his fury.

"You send me away—to steal my wife—I come back—"

An officer whipped out his pistol. He fired. He missed. Victor Pilapil's *bolo* made a blinding arc. The mayor, Nicolas Yerro, had no place to run. The ranks behind him stood fast. The straggling zombies were worse than the touch of death, for he sensed that no *rico*, no *político* could come within reach of those things without being torn apart.

The accusation, and the murmur of understanding—these were what paralyzed him. More than guess and gossip had spread the news of his lovely new housekeeper.

A Jap drew his pistol. It jammed in the burnished holster. The sweeping *bolo* sliced the mayor slantwise from collarbone to stomach. He did not fall apart and spill until he dropped.

Meanwhile, Kane got busy with his pistol. He was scarcely aware of the bullets whisking past him, for they bowled over a zombie to one side of him. The two Jap officers doubled up, kicking, clutching their bellies. They'd stopped a .45-bullet apiece, not a puny 7-mm. Nambu's pill.

The clock in the belfry began to toll.

Mutiny at ten? That was up to the rank and file.

A constabulary captain, seeing that no one of higher rank was taking charge, drew his pistol, and shouted a command. Bolts clashed. He was going to sweep the square with fire.

"Don't shoot Escobido's men! Stop!"

The Home Guard was breaking ranks. Bayonets leveled off. Spontaneously, these half-trained men reverted to steel, to close in before the constabulary could jam home their clips.

Zombies came from the further flank. "Go ahead and kill us! Escobido tried to!"

A furious crowd now packed the square. There'd either be massacre or mutiny. The governor was yelling. Pilapil howled and waved his dripping *bolo*. He gestured. A Home Guard charged at the constabulary captain. The pistol crackled, but the man behind the bayonet screamed like a fighting stallion, and waded in. The two toppled in a kicking heap, one spitted through, and the other riddled.

Then Kane yelled and pointed.

Smoke rose high and black from the airfield.

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Murky flame columned against the sky. Belts of machine-gun cartridges crackled like bamboo fire. Bombs let go with long, grumbling blasts.

The constabulary balked. The sight of Escobido's slaves, the smell of blood, and the knowledge of how Yerro had earned his fate, that meant more than the New Order.

Haji joined Kane in shouting, "Break into the arsenal! Get all the cartridges! Grab and head for the hills!"

The phone wires had been cut. Ximenes and his raiders, coming from the airport, said that they'd knocked out the short wave. And then Ximenes told the constabulary and Home Guard, "I'm Philippine Army, original army, unsurrendered army. Take my orders, and we'll win!"

They believed him, because he sounded like a soldier, and though wearing no uniform, he nevertheless looked like one, now that he chose to. Kane looked at the clock.

Mutiny, and only a little after ten.

TRUCKS were taken to the arsenal to be loaded with munitions. The storehouses of *Escobido y Yerro, Ltda.* yielded dynamite, intended for road-building gangs. It also contained rice, sugar, and other staples which the partners had hoarded, for release in dribbles, via the black market. Women crowded around, screaming and clawing, to get their share. The sight of this plunder, and the

spreading story of the slave gangs, set the entire town on a rampage.

Kane and half a dozen constabulary privates guarded the governor in his house. He was glad to have protection, and even more so, when, looking from a window, he saw a mob closing in on Escobido's place.

A truck plowed its way through the howling mob, and kept just ahead of it. Urbano Tabinga turned gray when he saw a man tied by the ankles, dragged along by a length of rope fastened to the tailgate. The man bounced and jerked along like a bag. The howling slaves threw stones and dirt.

Escobido was falling apart, piece by piece, from pounding against the cobblestone pavement. Kane said, "Don Urbano, he has given all collaborationists a bad name."

The governor croaked, "Good God, they'll get Proceso Ligot—they'll get my sister, Basilia. Send some men to protect—"

Kane looked at the frantic man, and said nothing.

"Protect *her*, at least! I beg of you. I've done my best for you—"

"You've got to trust them not to harm a woman. We can't let them get their minds off their work. Once they cool off a little, they'll weaken. The Home Guard, the constabulary, they've gone wild only because the citizens are running amuck. You understand?"

Tabinga turned away from the window and buried his face in his hands.

Presently, Jaime, the governor's son, came dashing into the house. The wild-eyed boy was frantic, and far too upset to handle more than one idea at a time. Kane did not recognize him until the governor cried, "Jaime, in God's name, what's happened in Maramag? Why are you here?"

"I've not been in Maramag, I've been a prisoner—Datu Ryan is coming through the cogon —they've shot Don Proceso. . ."

"Who shot him?" Kane shook the kid by the shoulder. "Ryan's men?"

"No, the rioters; they broke in." He laughed and said they were too late, he'd already radioed for soldiers from Maramag. He ordered them out, and someone had a gun. This was just before I got to the house.

"Then Aunt Basilia—"

Tabinga screamed, "They killed her, my sister?"

"No! She walked right to them and said, '*Señores*, he is dying. Now be Christians, don't tear him to pieces. If you want to burn the house, wait till he is dead and I can move him. Can I leave my husband here alone? Do you want to kill me, too?' And they were ashamed, and went away."

"Praise the saints!"

Kane turned to one of the guards. "Go tell Lieutenant Ximenes that the Japs are coming from Maramag and that Ryan is on the way."

Jaime was saying to his father, "Give me the keys; I want the car. I am taking Don Proceso and Aunt Basilia to Del Monte, to the hospital.

The sweeping bolo *sliced the mayor slantwise from collarbone to stomach. He did not fall apart and spill until he dropped to earth.*

Escobido, tied by the ankles, was dragged along by a piece of rope fastened to the tailgate of the truck. He was falling apart, piece by piece, from pounding against the cobblestones.

He'll not be safe here; someone will kill him."

"I thought he was dead, dying!" Kane snapped.

Excitement had left the boy no caution. "But not quite, my aunt fooled them."

Tabinga said, "He has the keys to the car."

Kane shook his head. Giving aid and comfort to the enemy was not one of Datu Ryan's doctrines.

Then Tabinga played his last card. "My sister warned me against Ligot, and because of her warning I went further with you than I would otherwise have done. You can afford to let her keep what is left of her husband."

Kane dug up the keys. "Here you are, Don Jaime. The car is behind the city hall. Get out before Ryan takes the town!"

Where the minutes had been racing, they now dragged. Kane gave a man Tabinga's field glasses, and sent him to the roof, to keep an eye on the road from Maramag. No time now to wonder why Ryan had come to town.

"Don Urbano, we'll leave you here if you think the mutiny speaks for itself, and convinces the enemy that you couldn't have connived at the mutiny."

"*I*, connive at all these horrible things!"

"Or come with us. We'll call you a hostage, and after the way *políticos* have been knocked off today, you won't be suspected. There'll hardly be reprisals against your relatives."

"If I only knew whether the Americans are going north to Luzon, or coming down this way!" he groaned.

"We don't know either, Governor. We're ready to pull out—leaving word that you'll be shot if there is pursuit. That might guard your relatives against reprisals, but it's up to you."

THE governor had no time to answer. "There he goes!" a soldier exclaimed, and they went to the window. The blue Packard was racing northward. Jaime was at the wheel; a woman and a wounded man were in the back seat. The rioters respected Tabinga's car.

And then the planes that Ligot had ordered came from Maramag. The town shuddered from their bombing. Tabinga cried, above the confusion, "Those devils! They don't know who is for them, and who is against them. They're bombing everyone alike!"

A second pass, and a third, now with machine guns. They were going to teach Malaybalay a lesson. The governor said, "Let me walk free. Let everyone see I go with you because I want to!"

And when Kane and Tabinga reached the street, Ryan and his guerrillas were in the bomb- and bullet-riddled town. More than half the Home Guard, and nearly all the con-

stabulary joined Ryan; those that did not were disarmed. And there were civilians, headed by Victor Pilapil; Maximina trudged along, balancing a basket of rations and cooking gear on her head.

On the march out of Malaybalay, Ryan told Kane and the governor about Jaime's message. "The boy wanted to leave, once he'd delivered what he said was word from you, but I don't play that way.

"It didn't sound quite reasonable, a rush order to bushwhack a Jap convoy, when I'd sent Kane to town simply because we had no cartridges. The boy was asleep on his feet, marching with us. He didn't know where he was going, but he was scared sick."

"But a boy, he would be, going into battle."

"No, Don Urbano! Scared from being with men he was leading into ambush. Ligot slipped, not knowing I'd sent Kane. More smart men go wrong, these days!"

Perhaps a mile out of Malaybalay, they saw the smoking remains of a big blue Packard in the ditch. A woman, and a ragged boy lay near the tall tree against which they had been flung when the Japanese pilot had strafed the car. Ligot was in the wreckage. His friends had cremated him.

Tabinga said to Kane, "I remain here with my dead. But expect me back. I go the way of Tomás Confesor. *Vayan con Dios!*"

So they left him with his son, and his sister, Basilia.

Some hours later, when they had come to a spot suitable for waylaying of the Japanese troops coming from the south, Kane said to Ryan, "The Army'll recognize you now! What'll you tell the liaison officer? About rank, I mean."

"Hell, I'd settle for colonel. With a stunt like today's, they can't offer me any less. Look at the recruits we got. And look what we can do to the Jap column coming up the road. Or we'll knock off an airport at Del Monte—or—"

"But suppose all you get is captain?"

"I'll say thank you. And when the guy is gone, I'll pin the bars on Daniel-Come-to Jedgment."

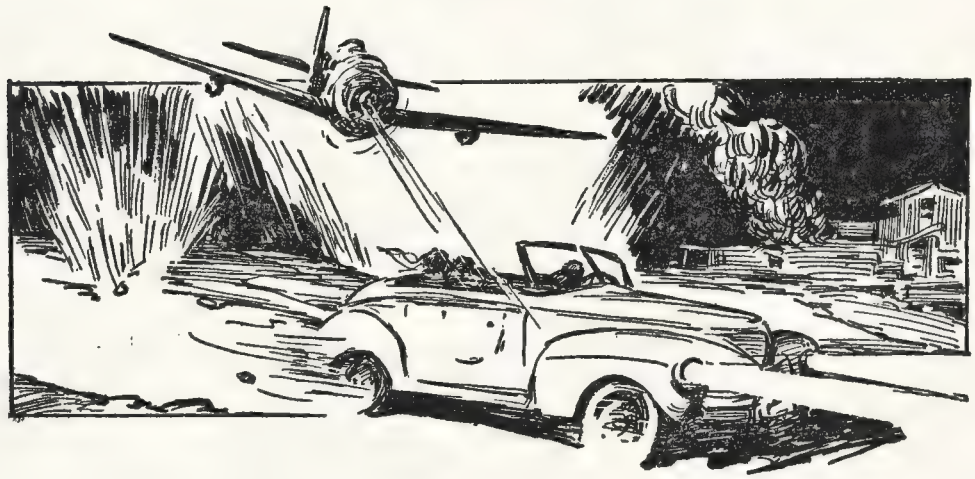
"No, suh, General! No, suh!" the Bishop cut in. "Y'all make me chaplain, with rank of captain."

But Kane had one more query. "You mean you'll take off your stars, and put on, say, eagles?"

"I figured that out, finally. The Sultan of Jolo has a treaty with the U.S. Government; he's at least halfway an independent ruler. Now, my Number One wife, Alima, is a fifth cousin of the sultan's uncle's second wife. Whatever kind of an in-law that makes me, the sultan will commission me a full general in the army of Jolo, on detached service. So I don't lose face with my in-laws and with my native friends.

"They can make me a corporal in the U.S. Army, if they just keep me supplied with rations and ordnance!"

Kane drew a deep breath. "Bishop," he said to the big Negro, "now that you're convinced your hoss hasn't suffered any damage, get busy with a thanksgiving service. We're going places!"



CAPTAINS ALL

WHEN I grabbed hold of the ratlines and swung down aboard the *Seal* I saw a little old man walking around the mainmast. He was going around and around with nary a letup, tap-tapping with a cane. Each time he made the starboard side the wind would comb his white whiskers, his gentle face would light up and he would glance up and down the deck, quite contented.

"New cook?" he squeaked, blue eyes meeting mine.

"'At's right," I said.

"Bunk's in the fo'c'sle," he said, with nary a letup in his walking.

"You cap'n?" I asked, for he had the stamp of cap'n on him.

"I be and I ben't," he beamed, and waved his cane.

So I gripped my seabag the tighter and stepped toward the bow, looking back at that old man. His black hat dipped from time to time as if he were bowing, his neatly patched jacket flapped about his sturdy frame and the knee patches on his trousers rose and fell as his rubber boots churned up and down.

The old man gave me such a turn, he did, that I stopped just abaft the fo'c'sle to look that ship over. A stump masted schooner, she was,

ILLUSTRATED BY GORDON GRANT

I didn't ask again who was cap'n; if they wanted to keep it secret, that was hunky-dory with me . . .

By FRANCIS GOTT

and neat and trim like a little lady all set for a party. Yet her deck had new planks here and there, her rigging was full of long splices cunningly tucked and her old canvas was sewn with pieces of new.

"Queer ship!" I muttered, real dubious.

Now I ain't a faint-hearted man, although I might've been better off if I was. So I climbed down into the fo'c'sle.

There were two men, one old, one middle-aged, hands cupping chins, elbows braced on a triangular mess table, at checkers, using the red and white squares of a tablecloth to play on. Three other men, all old, completed the crew, one sewing, one whittling, one sleeping. The old man who had been sleeping sat up.

"I'm Rafe Preble, the new cook," I said.

The middle-aged man looked up from his fixed stare at the checkers, rubbed a pink cheek and blinked blue eyes, real interested.

"Uncle Joe Cutter sent ye, eh?" he asked. He nodded, pointing. "'At's your bunk. Chowder for supper, b'y."

"You cap'n?" I asked, for he had the stamp of cap'n on him.

"Wa-al—I am and still again, I ain't," he said, then coughed and blew his nose.

He wa'n't of much size but sturdy; it came

. . . I looked each one over, without seeming to, and saw that each old man had the stamp of cap'n on him—and that was a puzzler.

over me that he was a younger edition of the old duffer up on deck. I got a chuckle out of his calling me 'b'y.' I'm fifty-two and pretty hefty and I got a hard face from leading a hard life.

The four old men glanced at me sideways as if I were to be checked off like a hogshead of trawl bait or a ton of packing ice. The old man in the bunk went to sleep again.

"Who's cap'n?" I asked, heaving my gear into my bunk.

The old man looked up from his checkers and said, "Sh'h!" The old man whittling said, "Sh'h!" and the old man sewing said, "Sh'h!" The little squeedunk of an old man sleeping opened beady brown eyes, sat up and said, "Sh'h!" too, as if 'cap'n' were a magic word.

"My, my," I whispered. "What's the secret?"

"Sh'h! Sh'h!"

Then it came over me that they are all very serious, very serious indeed. The four old men were looking away from the middle-aged man, yet to a man jack they were covertly watching him. His healthy pink jowls became still pinker; he acted flustered and agitated and clucked and fiddled with a checker as if he hadn't ary other interest in life.

I didn't ask again who was cap'n; if they wanted to keep it secret, that was hunky-dory with me. I looked each man over, without seeming to, and I saw that each old man had the stamp of cap'n on him—and that was a puzzler.

"I'm glad to know ye all, anyway," I said pointedly, sticking out my tobacco hooker at the first old man.

He gave my hand a shake, smiled and nodded at the other old men. They stuck out their tobacco hookers, sighed and chuckled and acted a lot happier, as if name calling was in the books and quite all right.

"I'm Orn Queedy," the middle-aged man said. "This feller playing checkers with me is Cap'n Sam Zachary; he ain't as dumb as he looks. The fat feller sewing, all furred out like a porcupine, is Cap'n Zeb Hobbs; every time Zeb moves he pops a button, which is why he don't shave often. The thin feller whittling lobster plugs is Cap'n Hiram Frederic; he ain't as sour as he looks. And that little string o' seaweed in the bunk there is Cap'n Cy Varp; he was born sleepy, I cal'ate."

"I'm right proud to cook for such a fine looking body of men," I said. "And who's the old gentleman pacing the mainmast?"

"Sh'h!"

"Sh'h! Sh'h!"

"Sh'h! Sh'h! Sh'h!"

An embarrassed silence coiled about that fo'c'sle. Queedy dropped his eyes. Zachary moved a checker. Hobbs breathed deep, popping a button from his vest. Frederic started whittling like all fury and Varp went back to sleep as if he got paid for it.

SO I turned to my bunk to dump my gear out of my sea bag. I noticed with considerable interest that the oak timbers were carved, carved all over like scroll work. I bent closer. The bunk was carved with names, many names. I looked at the other bunks; with a start I noted that there wasn't a name on ary one of 'em.

"Who's names?" I asked, studying them. "Good Down-East names for the most part."

"Cooks' names," explained Frederic, solemnly sucking hollow cheeks against a cud of tobacco.

"Must be nigh on to sixty," I figured. "That's a lot of cooks to come and go."

"More'n that." Frederic's frown was dour. "Some didn't last long enough to put their names down."

"What happened to 'em?"

"Ha!" again the covert glances.

So I figured I better let the mystery ride for a spell. After I got my gear straightened out and my clothes changed, I turned to the fo'c'sle range. Soon I had the toothsome smell o' haddock chowder weaving 'round about us all.

Cap'n Queedy looked up, a pleased expression making his ruddy features glow. He sniffed and turned to Cap'n Hobbs.

"H'ist your carcass topside, Zeb, and tell him the new cook's a'cookin' chowder."

"I cal'ate he can smell it, Orn," Cap'n Hobbs grumbled.

"Better tell 'im."

Cap'n Hobbs grunted in disapproval and, fat and wheezing, laid his sewing aside, got up and moved to the ladder. I watched him pretty close to see if he was going to pop a button. By the time he got to the top of the ladder and the upper part of him was bending to step out on deck, I cal'ated he wasn't. Then, suddenly—zip'p-p-p! That button, leaving the braces that held his pants up over his big backside, let go like a shot and pinged me in the eye.

"Ouch!" I yelled, and I ain't got a gentle voice.

Now it ain't no mild experience to be shot at with a button by a three hundred-pound man. Especially in the eye. It makes me ugly, sort of; scratches the tiger in me, see.

"Damned if I don't think the old coot did that on purpose," I accused, glaring about me.

I saw that them old duffers were staring at me, gawping and pleased, as I stood there like a fool with two fingers in my eye.

"Ye'll get used to it, me b'y," Cap'n Varp chuckled.

I was beginning to have my doubts about the innocence o' these old fellers.

Now Uncle Joe Cutter, who runs a ship chandlery business down Boston way, fixed me up with this here new berth—the understanding being that I was taking it for a rest, it not being very strenuous work cooking for

six, seven men; that is, be they normal men.

"Rafe," Uncle Joe had said to me, looking me over with them gimlet eyes of his, "ye're gittin' along. Ye've worked hard all through the war. Ye've been to Murmansk and Casablanca an' Honolulu. Ye've had two ships torpedoed out from under ye. Ye've fought Japs with your bare hands an' ye've chased Germans across the ice in the Baltic. I think it's time ye took a rest."

"Maybe so," I had agreed, kind of dubious. "But how's a feller goin' to rest as long as this war lasts? Now there's a spankin' new Liberty ship puttin' out for Malta and Alexandria in the mawnin'—"

Uncle Joe had shaken his white head. "Nope! Don't ride your luck too hard, Rafe. Now there's a little trawlin' schooner Down-East that's wantin' a first-class cook. Good chance for ye to rest up for two, three months. By that time ye'll be fresh an' can hit deep water again."

"Who's cap'n o' this here schooner?" I had asked.

"Oh, ye'll enj'y the *Seal,*" Uncle Joe had said, non-committal like.

So, respecting Uncle Joe's wisdom and advice, I had headed Down-East. It wasn't until I had got well under way that I recalled with an uneasy feeling the twinkle I'd seen in his eye when he'd told me I'd enjoy the *Seal.*

Well, here I was—being popped at by buttons. I'd cook a good meal for even my worst enemy, however, so I laid the table out good.

Cap'n Queedy and Cap'n Zachary put their checkers aside for the time being. I noted with satisfaction that they all were casting sly glances at me'n the chowder.

By the time I had 'er on the table, steaming hot, the little old feller with the cane came down. He eyed the chowder, sniffed and chuckled, rosy-faced and eager as a boy. He pressed his cane into nippers against the bulkhead, took off his jacket and sat down.

"Did Orn tell ye to save a bowl for Pa?" he asked, nudging me.

"Who in hell's acres is Pa?" I asked.

"Sh'h! Sh'h! Sh'h!"

I looked around the fo'c'sle, studying the faces of them old men shushing me to silence. Every man jack of 'em was tense and embarrassed. All of 'em, that is, 'cept the little old feller with the whiskers. Cap'n Zachary was too red in the face and Cap'n Frederic too pink in the jowls. A creepy feeling took hold of me, it did.

The little old feller nudged me again. "Just leave a bowl of it in the kettle and let 'er simmer on the back of the stove."

"So we got another feller coming aboard, eh?" I asked, mystified. I counted noses again; there were just enough men to fill the bunks, including myself.

"Don't worry about Pa," the old feller assured me. He combed his whiskers, bright eyes cheerful and kindly.

"When'll Pa get aboard?" I asked.

"Pa ain't comin' aboard," the old feller explained. "Ye just save a bowl for him and he'll show up sometime before mawnin' to get it. Chances are ye won't even know when he does."

"Queer ship," I muttered, eyeing Cap'n Hobbs' buttons with fearful expectancy, for he was swinging his three hundred weight down the ladder.

They all heaved to 'round the table. I'd warmed the bowls, poured about a half cup of cream in each one and added a hunk o' butter. When the hot chowder steamed into the bowls and hit the cream the white meat o' the fish flaked open and the butter melted, spreading yellow oil slicks from middle to rim.

QUEER ship or not, it did my heart good to watch them old duffers eat. The determined, and harassed expression on Cap'n Orn Queedy's face sort of softened. Cap'n Hobbs, massive hulk shaking to his contented grunts, sure relished that meal. Cap'n Zachary, big-boned body bent over the bowl, sort of sucked

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in the steamy fish vapors as if he could taste 'em. Not forgetting the lank Cap'n Frederic whose hollow-cheeked face ceased to reflect the sardonic lights of his yellow eyes as he spooned that chowder into him. And that string of seaweed, Cap'n Varp, hung over his bowl as if 'twas going to creep away from him.

"Good chowder, cook," commented the old duffer with the whiskers, plump hands breaking a pilot biscuit.

"Glad ye like it," I said, pleased as all get-out.

"Yep! Got the real Down-East taste—and then some." He coughed, hesitated, combed his whiskers and eyed me searchingly, sort of anxious-like. "Hope ye stay."

"Why shouldn't I?" I asked; again that creepy feeling.

The old duffer sighed, blue eyes thoughtful. "Pa'll chuckle all over this chowder."

After supper they all went up on deck. All 'cept Cap'n Varp who plopped into his bunk like a spider into the wrinkles of an old blanket.

Being alone in the fo'c'sle with only one man, I decided to push my curiosity to a showdown.

"Cap'n Cy, who's the old gent with the whiskers and who's Pa?"

"Sh'h!"

"Now list'n here," I growled, menacingly.

"All right," he whispered, giving in. He eyed the open companionway hatch, seamed face a map of conflicting emotions—worry, craft, a desire to be secretive fighting another desire to gossip. "Bend closer."

I did.

"'At's Cap'n Oscar Queedy," he said, watching me close.

"Who? The old gent with the whiskers?"

"Yuss."

"He's cap'n of this hooker?"

"Wa-al—he be and he ain't."

"Now list'n here," I rasped, out of patience. "Someone's gotta be cap'n." Then, as an afterthought, "What's Cap'n Oscar Queedy to Cap'n Orn Queedy?"

"His pa."

"Then maybe Orn's cap'n?"

"Wa-all," Cap'n Varp fidgeted, uneasy. "In a way he be and in a way he ain't."

"Hump!" I had to shut my eyes and rub 'em, trying to keep a straight course. "Clear as a squid's ink so far. Who's this feller 'Pa' Cap'n Oscar was bidding me save the chowder for? Why can't he eat at regular hours same's the rest?"

Cap'n Varp's pointed mouth twitched in distress. "Sh'h! Sh'h!"

"Ye ain't hintin' he's cap'n, too?"

"Yuss! Cap'n, yuss."

"Ha!" I pounced on Cap'n Varp and shook him, "Then Pa's the real honest-to-goshen skipper o' this hooker?"

Cap'n Varp trembled under my hands. "Nope. Not 'xactly."

"I'll be dehorned for a sculpin!" I snorted. "The whole ship's manner by honest-to-goshen skippers, but still she ain't got nary a cap'n!"

Cap'n Varp sank back into the bunk, moaning. "It's a terrible mixed-up mess."

"How come?"

"Oh, Cap'n Orn wants to be the real skipper, but Cap'n Oscar won't let him; allows he's lost his nerve. None o' the rest of us thinks Orn oughta be skipper either, but they ain't none dast tell him so—right out, sort of."

"Cap'n Orn's cap'n, then?"

"'Tain't so! There's Pa."

"Pa who?"

"Oh! Oh!"

"Tell me!"

Cap'n Varp, eyes stricken, flopped farther back in his bunk, real distressed. "I ain't sayin' nothin' ag'in Pa."

I was beginning to get real dandery. What kind of a cook did they think I was, anyway, going out on a vessel that had a skipper to each bunk but still didn't have ary skipper on deck? Besides, Cap'n Varp acted as if his conscience was bothering him.

"Do I look foolish?" I asked, looking him straight in the eye.

"Wa-al, I've seen foolisher," he said finally, just as if I was forcing him to be truthful.

I could get nary more out of Cap'n Varp, for just then Cap'n Orn Queedy heaved his stocky body down the ladder. Cap'n Varp shut up like a clam.

"Heck," Cap'n Orn swore, disgruntled. "A man can't even give an order on his own ship any more."

"We was all skipperin' vessels when ye was wearin' diapers, Orn," Cap'n Varp reminded him.

Cap'n Orn sat down, mouth a grim line. I was beginning to suspect him being the younger man by twenty-five or thirty years, that all them old duffers was riding him for a goat.

Then a pair o' spindley legs, rubber boots at the bottom of 'em, clumped down the ladder. Cap'n Frederic. His leathery face broke into a grin and his old eyes lit up.

"Here I be still alive and off to sea for another trip," he chuckled. He reached into his bunk for a pine stick and began whittling out lobster plugs, looking sideways at Cap'n Orn. "Orn, that wa'n't no way to warp a vessel away from the wha'f. Now when I was master o' the *Seven Stars of the Orient*—"

Cap'n Orn rose, white-faced, and went topside.

"Orn ain't appreciative of a bit of practical advice," Cap'n Varp said, tartly.

Suddenly the deck took a slant under my feet, the timbers creaked and groaned and I had to reach for the bunk to steady myself. I listened to the tide gurgling past the hull, faster and faster. I heard the snarling of a block as a piece of running rigging raced

through it, the sharp report of a slatting sail and the merry tinkle of a ring bolt set in the deck. While I had been chewing a piece o' whale fat with Cap'n Varp, them other old skippers had put us to sea.

I took a peek up on deck. Cap'n Zeb Hobbs, all bristly and fat and important, had the wheel. As we made the point and met the breakers, he put the wheel hard over. Spray lashed high, reaching for us with lazy arms in a swirl of spindrift. Then Cap'n Hobbs strained to get her back amidships.

"I bet the old geezer is popping buttons now," I muttered. "Cal'ate I better stay for'ard here where I'm safe. I doubt if he can shoot this far."

"Oh, Zeb don't always pop 'em," Cap'n Frederic offered, looking up at me. "He sews 'em on pretty tight, but ye can't always tell; sometimes one lets go at a surprisin' moment."

"Ye're tellin' me," I retorted, dryly.

Before I pulled my head down to duck a spray, I noted that Cap'n Oscar Queedy, whiskers ruffled by the increasing wind, was leaning on his cane. He was watching Cap'n Zachary who, bridge coat flapping about his brawny legs, was pacing the tiny poopdeck. All three of 'em had the stamp of cap'n on em—Cap'n Orn, too, rubbing his chin by the mainmast. I wondered who in thunder really was cap'n o' this hooker.

"Well," I grunted, backing down the ladder and turning around. "Cal'ate I won't have to keep that chowder warm after all; Pa didn't get aboard."

TAKING the kettle from the back of the stove where I had it wedged in with heavy weather racks, I hung it up on a hook. I noted with some misgivings, however, that Cap'ns Varp and Frederic glanced at each other out of the corners of their eyes.

I hadn't any more'n got my stern planked down on a bench locker when Cap'n Oscar came down, face glowing like two red apples at the cheekbones which was the only part not covered by whiskers.

"Why," he said, sharp-eyed, "ye've took Pa's chowder off the stove! Put it back, cook!"

"I thought Pa didn't get aboard," I said. I obeyed orders, however.

"Oh, don't ye ever worry about Pa," Cap'n Oscar chuckled.

So I figured maybe we were going to pick Pa up somewheres out to sea, sort of like a Cape Horn pilot. Well, that was their worry, not mine. So, having had a hard day, I took to my bunk. I let the motion of the ship sort of nestle me down while I dozed off. Real peaceful, she was, that little ship, and a delight to my tired soul and body.

Nevertheless, thinking about the general air of secretiveness aboard, Cap'n Orn's obvious dissatisfaction as if he has been crossed somehow, and Cap'n Oscar's almost too cheerful disposition, I wasn't altogether easy in mind as I dropped off to sleep.

I looked up into a face, aged, hairless, mahogany skin dried and taut right into the bones. "Good chowder, me b'y. Right good chowder to warm an old man's innards," he said.

Several hours later I came to with a start, sweat beading on my forehead. For a moment I thought I was in convoy with a load of mines and munitions topside and between decks. Then, as I looked up through the fo'c'sle hatch, saw the stars winging across the velvet pit of the heavens, heard spray drumming against canvas and the wind whimpering through the rigging, I knew that the vessel I was on was the little *Seal*. Yep! Sailing along in comparatively safe waters, heading for the fishing grounds on the Banks.

Suddenly I heard a chuckle, hollow, empty, carried by a voice that was awful old.

"Heh! Heh! So ye're the new cook!"

My scalp prickled. I turned my head and looked up into a face, aged, hairless, mahogany skin dried and taut right into the bones. Little eyes, too old to have held their color long since, peered down at me, curiously. An old old man's head, nodding on a skinny neck. All he has on was a nightshirt, dropping down to mere bones of legs and feet.

"Good chowder, me b'y. Right good chowder to warm an old man's innards."

"Glad ye liked it," I said, coming out of my bunk.

I saw he had a spoon in one hand and an empty bowl in the other.

"Sh'h! Sh'h!" he whispered, nodding toward the bunks, now full of sleeping men. "Don't wake 'em b'ys up—I scares 'em."

I tried not to let on that he scared me, too; I was afraid he was going to fall apart before my eyes.

"So you must be Pa!" I said.

"Yup," he nodded like a sociable skeleton. "Oliver Queedy, last master o' the *Stanley T. Drake*, four-masted windjammer on the China run."

"How in hell's acres did ye get aboard?" I asked, mystified.

"Oh, I stays aboard the whole time; goin' to die aboard, I cal'ate." He bent close, whispered in my ear, "I got to keep an eye on Oscar and Orn, ye know. Orn ain't capable. Only Queedy I knows of who can't cap'n a ship. Awful, ain't it, to have a bone like that in the closet?"

In sudden defense of Orn, I spoke up, "Pretty stout bone, Cap'n Orn is, if you ask me."

"Yup, Orn's a good b'y," the old man sighed.

The bulkhead clock struck eight bells, startlingly clear in that tiny fo'c'sle. I bet I jumped a foot.

"Oh, my!" the old man exclaimed. "I must get back! Gettin' along toward morning."

In anxious haste he wedged spoon and bowl into the wood box.

"Where do ye stow yourself?" I asked, curious.

"Oh, I got me a nice cabin back aft, where the lazaretto used to be. Oscar fixed it up all nice for me to die in."

Then as an afterthought struck him, he bent close.

"Don't forget to carve your name on the bunk," he begged. "Ye will, won't ye, cookie? I likes to sit here and read 'em off as I eats my victuals. Gets lonesome, eatin' all alone in the night."

"Why should I carve my name on the bunk?" I asked, exasperated. "Looks like you've got enough names already. Probably poor fellows you half scared to death, prowling around dark decks at night in a nightshirt, barefooted, when you ought to be in your bunk. 'Tain't decent, a man your age—"

"Oh, ye will," he insisted. His chuckles sounded like dice rattling in a bony hand. "Ye'll carve, cookie!"

With that parting shot he scuttled up the ladder.

Carve, would I? Humph! Harrumph'h! What kind of a ship was this anyway?

Well, I had lost my sleep for that night. So I dressed and went up on deck. 'Bout time to start breakfast anyway. It was a nice morning, mild, yet a mite sharp for the latter part o' May.

Prowling along the wet deck, I banged my shin against a trawl tub lashed against the hatch amidships. Finally I reached the stern.

"Early bird, ain't ye, cookie?" came a grunt from the wheel.

LIMNED in the feeble light thrown up from the binnacle, I saw Cap'n Orn's determined features hanging in mid-air like a jack o' lantern. All the rest of him, 'cept for the pudgy fingers o' one hand nursing a top spoke, was hid in a pocket of darkness.

"Well, I've met Pa," I grunted. "Woke me up from a sound sleep, he did, the night-owlin' ol' coot."

There was an awkward silence, finally broken by Cap'n Orn's deprecating voice. "Got to make allowances for Gran'pa. Don't let 'im scare ye off'n the ship, Mr. Preble. Ye're too good a cook. We can't keep ary cook, 'count o' Gran'pa."

"Why do ye let the old duffer prowl around at night like that? He's apt to break a leg or fall overboard."

"I know it," Cap'n Orn sighed, real doleful-like. "Ye've got no idea what I've got to put up with aboard this vessel. But Gran'pa Queedy and Pa Queedy stick together—and all them other old cap'ns, too; I can't get a word in edgewise."

"He's too old to be going to sea anyway," I said, watching a star glimmer on the horizon. "He must be all of a hundred year old."

"Not quite." Cap'n Orn gave the wheel a couple of spokes to starboard helm. "Gran'pa's only ninety-seven. He ain't contented ashore, though. We tried boardin' him out, but it didn't work; he was always runnin' away to Boston or New York or some such place and tryin' to ship out. This bein' wartime and a lot of dumb fellers in charge o' shippin' we was scared one of 'em might give him a ship and he'd get everybody drowned. Gran'pa can't see good; he's just as like as not mistake a ledge for an open channel and try to drive a ship clean through it."

"So ye keep him aboard here, eh?"

"Yup. He's contented aboard the *Seal*. Pa watches him in the daytime and I keeps an eye on him at night."

"So that was why Cap'n was pacing the deck when I come aboard yesterday?"

"Yup."

"Why don't ye let the old gentleman sleep nights and do his prowling in the daytime?"

Cap'n Orn's mouth stiffened in exasperation. "He ought to. Pa gives in to him too much and the others uphold Pa. Now, if'n I was cap'n—"

"Ye ain't cap'n?"

"Well, I am and I ain't." Cap'n Orn sounded distracted. He took a bite of tobacco and

spat toward the dawn light spreading in the east. "I started in wrong with these old cap'ns. Ye see, after the war began, and the news o' the Japs blastin' Pearl Harbor made us all so all-fired mad, and all the young fellers went into the service or into the shipyards, these old retired skippers took it into their heads that they'd like to be doing somethin' useful to aid the war effort. So, bein' foolish in the head, I cal'ate, one wintery day when we was spinnin' yarns around a red hot stove in my fish house, I puts an idea up to 'em—"

"So?"

" 'Well,' I says to 'em, 'Cap'n Frederic, Cap'n Zachery, Cap'n Varp, Cap'n Hobbs and Cap'n Pa Queedy, ye're all able-bodied men even though ye have sot on your backsides these five, ten years past chewin' whale fat. Now here's an idea: let's take the old *Seal,* haul her out o' the mud, fix her up and put her in commission. Fish prices are high. Ye're all wantin' to do something useful—'

"The idea took hold better'n I expected. Them old sea warts hadn't forgot a thing. They fixed the *Seal* up, replanked her, spliced new wire and manila riggin' and patched a couple o' sets of old sails. Then we put to sea with new trawlin' gear, and before I knew it I wa'n't cap'n any more."

"Everyone o' them old duffers was skipper instead of you, eh?" I chuckled.

Cap'n Orn barked a harsh laugh. "Right ye are, cook. It ain't funny to me, however, havin' five, six old sea dogs gettin' the upper hand."

"Whyn't ye get out?"

"Can't! My money's tied up in the dad-blame thing. Funny part of it, the *Seal's* a payin' proposition."

"Maybe I can help ye out, Cap'n," I suggested. "Looks to me like ye're in a tight spot. If'n ye don't handle it just right, ye're apt to have these old codgers barking at your heels the rest o' your life."

Cap'n Orn's voice took on a grateful tremor.

"Thanks," he coughed. "Don't see what ye can do, cook. Likely ye'll quit anyway."

"How so?"

"Oh, ye'll get fed up with Cap'n Gran'pa Queedy pesterin' ye o' nights. Then ye'll quit, like all the other cooks."

"Humph!" I snorted. "Rafe Preble don't quit easy."

I headed for'ard to get breakfast. Quit, would I?

By nightfall, surging along at a good clip under a fair wind, we were another hundred miles or so out on the Banks. I had to hand the brass monkey fist to Uncle Joe Cutter; he sure knew his ships—and men.

I was commencing to get a sight of comfort out of the *Seal.* By supper I had worked up a real peeve against the way them old has-

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beens had ganged up on Cap'n Orn. It was their last fling at life, I cal'ated, and they were taking full advantage of it. It was, "Orn, ye mark my words," and "Orn, now ye listen to me or ye'll never make a skipper," and, "Orn, if'n ye'd been born twenty-five or thirty year sooner ye'd've seen how 'twas done on the ol' *Lampert Pray*."

Well, I got sick of it mighty quick. Any form of injustice riles me.

AFTER supper I hit the bunk, trying to think this thing out. I doubt if a bed in heaven could rest any easier'n a well-padded bunk aboard a windship. I hadn't hardly any more'n got to snoozin', however, than loud shouts up on deck woke me. Everybody was in their bunks, asleep, 'cept Cap'n Orn who had wheel watch. I went topside in a hurry. Under the pale light of a wisp of a moon, I saw Cap'n Orn looking up into the mainmast rigging.

"Now, ye come down off'n that mast, Gran'-pa Queedy!" Cap'n Orn was shouting over the top of the steering wheel. "Come down off'n there before ye fall and scatter your bones all over the deck! Make it snappy, now!"

I craned my neck. Sure enough, I saw Gran'pa Queedy high aloft, limned against the thin moon. His nightshirt was flapping about his bones and he was having a high old time of it. Bare toes clinging to the ratlines, one hand gripping the truck, he was shaking the knotted fist of the other at the deck beneath.

"Ye shuddup, Orn Queedy!" he ranted. "I clumbed rigging before ye was ever thought of."

"Heck!" I cried. "If this ain't a ship! How'n thunder we goin' ta get him down?"

"Don't ye worry about Pa," came a squeak at my elbow. "Pa'll come down when he gets good and ready."

Looking over my shoulder, I saw Cap'n Oscar. He had his whiskers tied with a string to a top button of his pajama jacket. He waved me below. Obeying, and glad I didn't have to shin aloft after Cap'n Oliver, I went below again, wondering why Cap'n Oscar had to have his whiskers tied down when he slept.

Maybe two hours later I woke with a start to see Cap'n Oliver peering down at me. I realized that he had been plucking at my eyelids like a monkey to tell whether or not I was asleep.

"Heh! Heh! When ye goin' to carve, b'y?" he asked, shoving a slab of apple pie into his mouth.

"Carve, me eye!" I growled. "Never!"

"Oh, yes ye will!" His chuckles sounded more than ever like dice rattling in a bony hand.

"Go away!" I warned him.

I watched him back away and putter about the stove. Even though I was riled at being woke up, I was afraid he'd get his nightshirt on fire. To my relief he finally went up on deck. With goose pimples prickling the nape of my neck, I turned my back to the fo'c'sle and went to sleep again.

'Twasn't long before the old devil woke me up again.

"Wunnerful good pie, cookie," he chirruped, hairless eyelids winking. Then he started chuckling. Enough to give a man the shiverin' willies, 'twas. "Goin' to carve? Come now, cookie; be a good cookie. Put yer name on yer bunk, cookie, and I won't ask ye any more."

"All right," I gave in, reluctant. After all, a man's got to get his rest. "Promise you won't pester me any more."

"Good cookie. I promise." He chuckled, real happy. "Here ye be, a guttin' knife. I keeps 'em sharp."

Plucking a wicked-looking knife from a row of splitting, gutting and bait cutting knives stuck into the bulkhead, he handed it to me.

So, like a damn fool, I carved, *Rafael Bradford Preble, Boston, 1944.*

"Got ye to do it, didn't I, cookie?" Cap'n Oliver chortled. He slapped his thigh so hard he rattled all over.

"Yes," I admitted. I got an awful mean streak in me, though, and just carving my name on that bunk was giving me ideas. And when Rafe Preble, sea cook, gets ideas. . .

I climbed topside, went aft and had a chew with Cap'n Orn.

"Now, look here, Cap'n Queedy," I coughed, acting kind of embarrassed, which I wasn't. "None o' these old skippers has ary bit o' faith in your skipperin' ability, 'ears like. Has they?"

Cap'n Orn choked all up, could hardly speak.

"Well," I said, laying a soothing hand on his shoulder, "Rafe Preble don't know all the answers, but he's been around consid'able. These old cap'ns—your own pa and gran'pa included—has a lot o' sea moss growin' 'tween their ears. It's high time somethin' was done to sot 'em in their places."

"How ye goin' to?" Cap'n Orn asked, sort of wistful. "After all, it's one cap'n ag'in six—an' they've all been rip roarin' skippers in their day."

"Let's see," I mused. "We'll give 'em a scare, show 'em up, every man jack of 'em. Then ye can take over fully as skipper. Every time they tries to push ye, ye just twit 'em about it. That's the way to stop this foolishness, 'specially about Cap'n Oliver prowlin' about at night, wakin' up cooks and half scarin' 'em to death."

"How'll we go about it?" Cap'n Orn was cautious yet eager.

I took a deep breath and then plunged. "To show my faith in your ability in navigation and seamanship, I'm goin' to sot myself adrift in a dory, right now, and let ye sail on for fifty, eighty mile or so, until mawnin' when all the old duffers will discover I'm gone. Ye can change course, do a bit o' traverse sailing; then none of 'em will know how to find me. They'll be flustered and ye can take over."

Cap'n Orn was kind of dubious. "They might not get too flustered about a cook—still again they might, ye bein' such a good one and they favorin' their stomachs so."

"I know a cook don't amount to much," I had to agree. "For that reason I'm takin' Cap'n Gran'pa Queedy. That'll stir 'em up, I bet, like a regular hornet's nest."

"Ye won't take Gran'pa!" Cap'n Orn sounded shocked.

"Why not? He's tougher'n a loon. If he can prowl around wet decks all night, climb masts and riggin', a few hours in a dory won't hurt him nary a mite."

"All right," Cap'n Orn gave in.

SO I stowed a few stores in a dory. Then I went huntin' for Cap'n Oliver.

"He's in his quarters," Cap'n Orn said pointing at a turtleback companionway hatch that had been built over the lazaretto.

I slid 'er open, went below and found as neat and nautical a cabin as I ever did see. Ship models were screwed against the bulkhead, an old pennant hung over the door, and a couple of pistols and a rifle were bracketed above the bunk. Cap'n Oliver was in the midst of all this luxury, tapping a barometer with his knuckles.

"You and me are goin' to take a dory ride," I offered.

"Oh, no I ain't," he objected. "What ye doin' in my cabin, cook?"

"Oh, yes ye be," I said, getting grim.

I saw that I had to be firm with him. He put up an awful struggle for an old feller.

"Oh, no ye don't!" he shouted.

I clamped a hand over his mouth, but he twisted free.

"Orn! Oscar!" he cried. "Cook's gone crazy. Zeb! Cy! Sam! Hiram! Come a runnin'!"

I shoved a handkerchief into his mouth to stop his fool bawling. Then I got him all bundled up in a blanket I had stripped off his bunk and, sweating and grunting, I got him topside and into a dory. I got the dory over, jumped down, painter in hand, and shoved 'er off. Then I watched the *Seal* fade away into the night.

"There'll be some consternation aboard the ol' hooker come mawnin'," I chuckled. I took Cap'n Oliver's gag out and tucked him into the stern as comfortable as possible. "Ha! Wait till they want breakfast and discover you and me is dory-pullin'."

"Quite a lark, ain't it?" cackled Cap'n Oliver. "Ain't nothin' crazier'n a sea cook. Give me a swig out'n that bottle ye got on your hip, cookie."

"How'd ye know I got a bottle?" I countered.

"Heh! Heh!"

So I gave the old duffer a swig. Drinking enough to put an ordinary man to sleep—good rum, too—he started singing, *It won't get well if you pick it.*

I took a snort from the bottle, too, wrapped myself up in a blanket and went to sleep. I woke up in time to see the sun breaking through the sea mist to the east'ard. I glanced at Cap'n Oliver, relieved to note that he was sleeping peacefully like a friendly mummy.

As the morning advanced, I had a few cheerful thoughts—like wondering what would happen to us if Cap'n Orn should drop dead or fall overboard. So I studied the ocean which didn't seem to have changed much in the past forty, fifty years. However, I knew from experience that, like a bear, I could live off my fat for a long time. How about Cap'n Oliver,

(Continued on page 145)

Kidneys Must Remove Excess Acids

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If you have an excess of acids in your blood, your 15 miles of kidney tubes may be overworked. These tiny filters and tubes are working day and night to help Nature rid your system of excess acids and poisonous waste.

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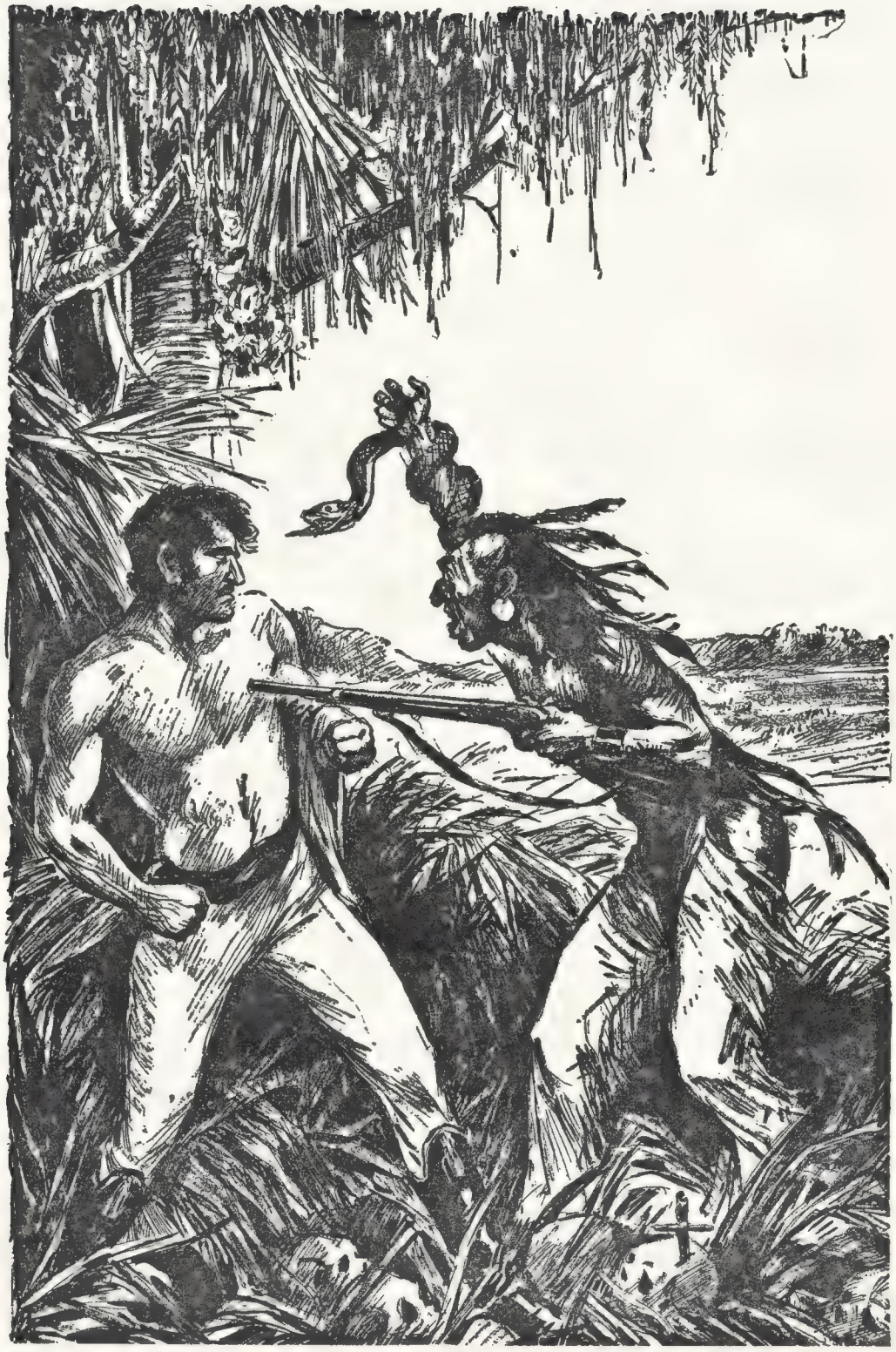


DIAMOND-BACK

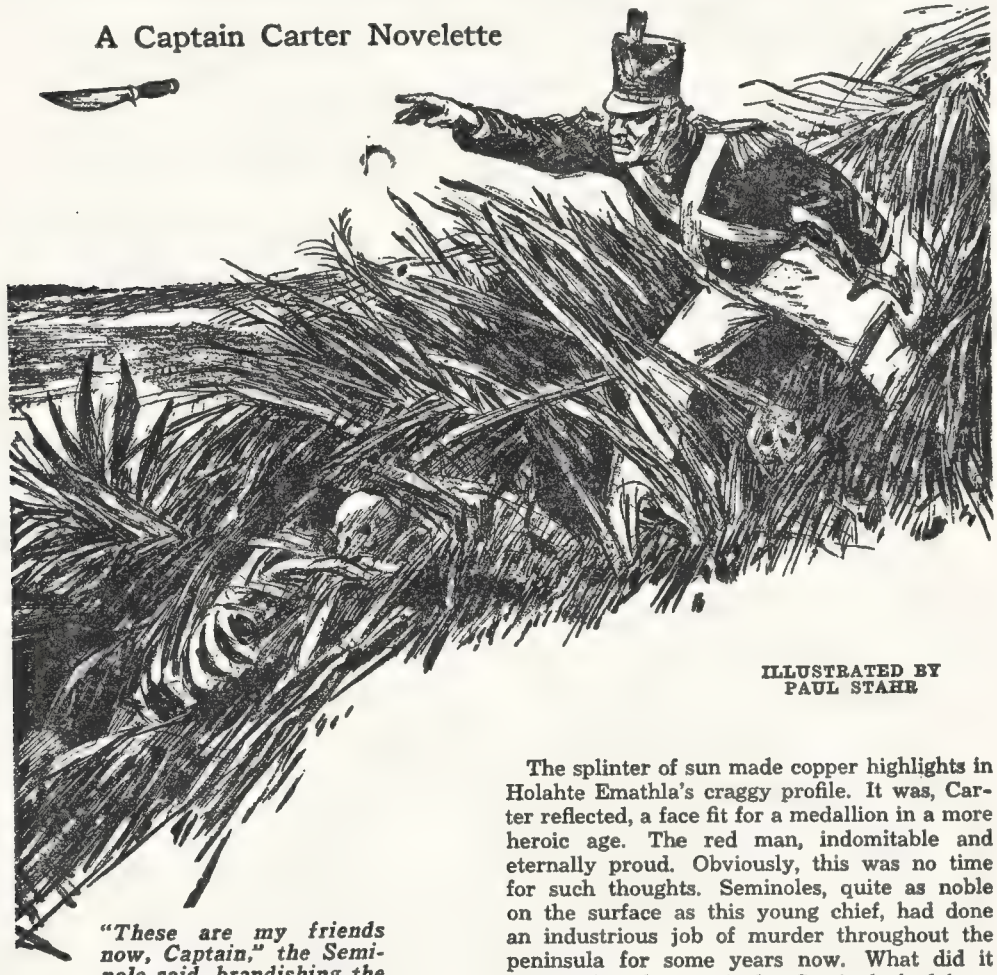
By WILLIAM DU BOIS

THE red man said smoothly, "Surely the Captain has heard of Serpa's Trove?"

Brevet Captain John Carter nodded easily, and kept his blank stare intact. His eyes had not left the Indian's since he and Grady had come into the dungeon; Grady, he knew, was watching just as intently from the half-gloom behind him. But Chief Holahte Emathla had endured the two-way scrutiny with aplomb. Now, serene as ever in his ceremonial turban and buckskins, he raised his face to the glint of light seeping through the high, barred slit in the coquina. His voice sounded calm as a good conscience as he took up his plea again. This time, Carter ceased to marvel at the purity of the Seminole's Spanish. After all, it fitted the background too well: reminder that this fort had been part of colonial Spain not so long before. Before the United States had extended its boundaries to take in the Floridas—and the dilemma of another Indian war.

"How often must I tell the captain there is a man, that I can show him the way myself?"

A Captain Carter Novelette



ILLUSTRATED BY PAUL STAHR

"These are my friends now, Captain," the Seminole said, brandishing the snake's head before Carter. Then a blue flash whined through the still air above them.

The splinter of sun made copper highlights in Holahte Emathla's craggy profile. It was, Carter reflected, a face fit for a medallion in a more heroic age. The red man, indomitable and eternally proud. Obviously, this was no time for such thoughts. Seminoles, quite as noble on the surface as this young chief, had done an industrious job of murder throughout the peninsula for some years now. What did it matter that this particular Seminole had been educated by friars, here in Augustine? That he would return tomorrow to his tribe to preach the ways of peace?

The Seminole said, "Shall we remember the story of Juan Serpa once again, Captain?"

Carter spoke at last. "There is no need to remember aloud, *jefe*." No need at all, he told himself wryly. He had poured over the archives too long for that. He remembered the dusty library of the building on Treasury Street, the tome that had come from a press in Madrid. The story of one Juan Serpa whilom mate to Masters, the English buccaneer—and whilom factor, too, ashore in Augustine, when piracy was an open thing along the coast. . . Carter had read Serpa's story a dozen times, if only as an excuse to burnish his Castilian. There had been time for reading, here in Augustine, in the uneasy truces that marked this Indian war.

He remembered how Serpa had pretended to leave Masters' employ when the English took over the Floridas, just before the American Revolution. At that time, the buccaneer had skulked in the West Indies, daring only an occasional raid as far north as Augustine. Serpa —so far as Augustine knew—had turned into a respectable indigo planter, with a pantation adjoining the famous Turnbull estate, near what was now the village of New Smyrna. Perhaps it was only a coincidence that Masters dared to careen his ships, now and again, in a wild bay down the coast. And another accident that Serpa continued to prosper in the Floridas, after most of his countrymen had departed. But it was no accident that he should leave Florida abruptly, just before the English beagles tracked him down at last.

As Providence would have it, Masters had been victualing his ship in that East Coast bay when the blow fell. He had taken his most faithful servant aboard (so the legend said), played a deadly game of touch-tag with the British in the Bahama Passage, and had got away clean. The legends continued to grow as time went on—the pirate brig had vanished in mid-ocean, without leaving a trace; a hurricane had swallowed it; Masters had sailed clean around the world and sold his services to a sultan in Borneo; Masters and Serpa had taken their last bag of gold to Paris, and drowned themselves in wine, like princes in a fable. . . All of the endings, in fact, were more than a little fabulous. But the chronicle insisted that they never returned to the Floridas, and that the fruits of that long piracy were still buried on the Eastern coast, not too far from Serpa land.

Like many legends of this sort, the story of the Serpa Trove had taken on a pleasant patina with time. Spades had been plied busily—and fruitlessly—among the dunes and dry savannas of the coast, to track down the cache. Old maps had been combed over in the archives to determine the exact extent of Serpa's land-grant, and the exact spot he must have chosen to hide his master's wealth. Even Carter himself had shuffled through a few dusty charts in his time. . . Somehow, it seemed only natural to be reminded of that search now, in flawless Spanish, by a Seminole chieftain who had hunted over that some scrub since boyhood.

"What do you think, Grady?"

HE HAD not meant to ask that question so soon. Valuable as his sergeant's opinions were, Carter knew they should be expressed in private. And yet, it was Grady who had urged this interview. With an inward smile, he knew that it was Grady who would decide if it was worth while to pin Holahte Emathla down. The Seminole echoed that thought now, with the faintest of smiles.

"Let the sergeant speak, please. He knows when an Indian is lying, Captain—do not ask me how."

Grady squared off from the Chief, taking his time. The sergeant was an amiable ox of a man, who should have looked top-heavy and didn't. A vastly reassuring bulk that should have been grotesque in a dress-uniform—and wasn't. Grady, reflected Carter, might have posed for another sort of medallion. Like the Seminole, he was a perfect type. The eternal sergeant, who can make himself at home anywhere even in an ex-Spanish dungeon, discussing buried treasure with an Indian prisoner.

Grady said equably, "I think we might have a look, Captain, if we can get leave. The map sounds real enough. So does the Chief here. 'Course, I'll believe in the Serpa trove when I've seen it. Even the Chief admits he hasn't gone that far, yet."

"The Swamp of the Dead is sacred ground," said the Seminole. "I could not venture there."

"But you'd show *us* the way in—and out?"

"Gladly, Sergeant, if you'd care to make the search."

Carter cut in on this amiable interchange. "Permit me to understand, if I can, Holahte Emathla. First, you tell us that you have a map left by Juan Serpa with his confessor. That this confessor later became a visiting friar among the nation, and died in your village years ago, with the map on his person."

"*Precisamente.*"

"You believed that he was seeking the treasure himself, for the glory of his church and his God. You kept the map, in the Chief's house. At the time you could neither read nor write, but you guessed its value."

"*Es verdad, Capitán,*" said Holahte Emathla.

"Why did you keep it in the Chief's house until now? Why not put it into our hands at once, if you feared the swamp?"

The Seminole smiled patiently. "We were at peace with the white man then, Captain. There was no need for gift-offerings."

"Your Chiefs have signed a truce today. You

are to be returned to your people tomorrow. Why not keep your secret?"

"This time, I go back to my people to persuade them to be transported. We will need favors, Captain, when we move to the West. So I offer a favor now, in exchange." Once again, Holahte Emathla proved how wholeheartedly an Indian could smile. "The offer is from the heart. Do with it as you wish."

"You're asking us to go alone with you into the nation. Just the two of us—"

Slowly and patiently, Emathla replied.

"You could not bring a force, Captain, so soon after the truce. My people might misunderstand."

Here the Seminole spread his hands. "To be honest, there will be no welcome, even for you. Not while I must persuade them to go across the water to the West. They will think you are spies; they will say you come back with me to make sure I keep my promise to your general. . . But I will give you safe-conduct from the bank of the St. Johns. It is a chance that you must take."

"How do I know you won't hold *us* as hostage?"

Holahte Emathla's eyes did not waver. "You have my word on that as well."

"Promises have been made before in the Floridas—"

"Our war began with a broken promise," the Seminole agreed. "For all we know it may end with one, as well. That, too, is a chance we must take."

White captain and Indian warrior faced one another in silence, in the damp coquina arch of the dungeon. Then, as proctocol demanded, Carter snapped into a crisp salute. In the half-gloom behind him, Sergeant Grady echoed the heel-click smartly.

Carter said, "I will confer with my general, and bring you our answer by nightfall."

Once again, white teeth flashed in the copper mask. "I know what your answer will be, Captain."

Striding down the damp corridor toward sunlight again, Captain Carter nodded a silent agreement—and added sharply to himself that his motive transcended mere greed. After all (unless the legend lied) the bulk of Masters' spoils would be in English bullion. Washington, not the Army, must rule on its disposal, assuming he could put the Serpa Trove into the general's hands. Lawyers would huddle in a paneled office to decide if it could be applied to long outstanding British debts in the Floridas. . . .

He cursed lawyers adequately, as he strode up the ramp to the terreplein and breathed salt air again.

Carter knew that he would ride south with Holahte Emathla tomorrow, that he was still young enough to believe in treasure-troves—even on an Indian's word.

STUMPING the terreplein of the Fort with the white revers of his dress-coat flapping in the languid summer breeze, and staring at the heat-haze of the Matanza estuary below them, Carter found that reality was slow in returning. The brave stir of the American flag on the sentry-box above them, and the thud of the sentry's feet on the cat-walk above the Indians' prison-pen did nothing to break the spell. Leaning from the gun-mount, he could stare down at the dry moat below, and mark the spot where Oglethorpe's cannon had gouged the coquina walls. The pockmarks of a firing-squad beside the hot-shot oven. . . Yes, the thumb-print of Imperial Spain was still heavy here. It was easy to go back a little more and picture the day that Serpa bargained with a Spanish governor for Masters' sanctuary.

Grady spoke respectfully at his elbow. "You'll ride the calico again, sir?"

"I haven't said we'd go yet, Grady. Nor has the General given us his permission."

"The general and I had a long talk about 'Ola last night," said Grady. "When I said it was worth the risk, he said we could take it—providing, of couse, that *you're* willing, Captain."

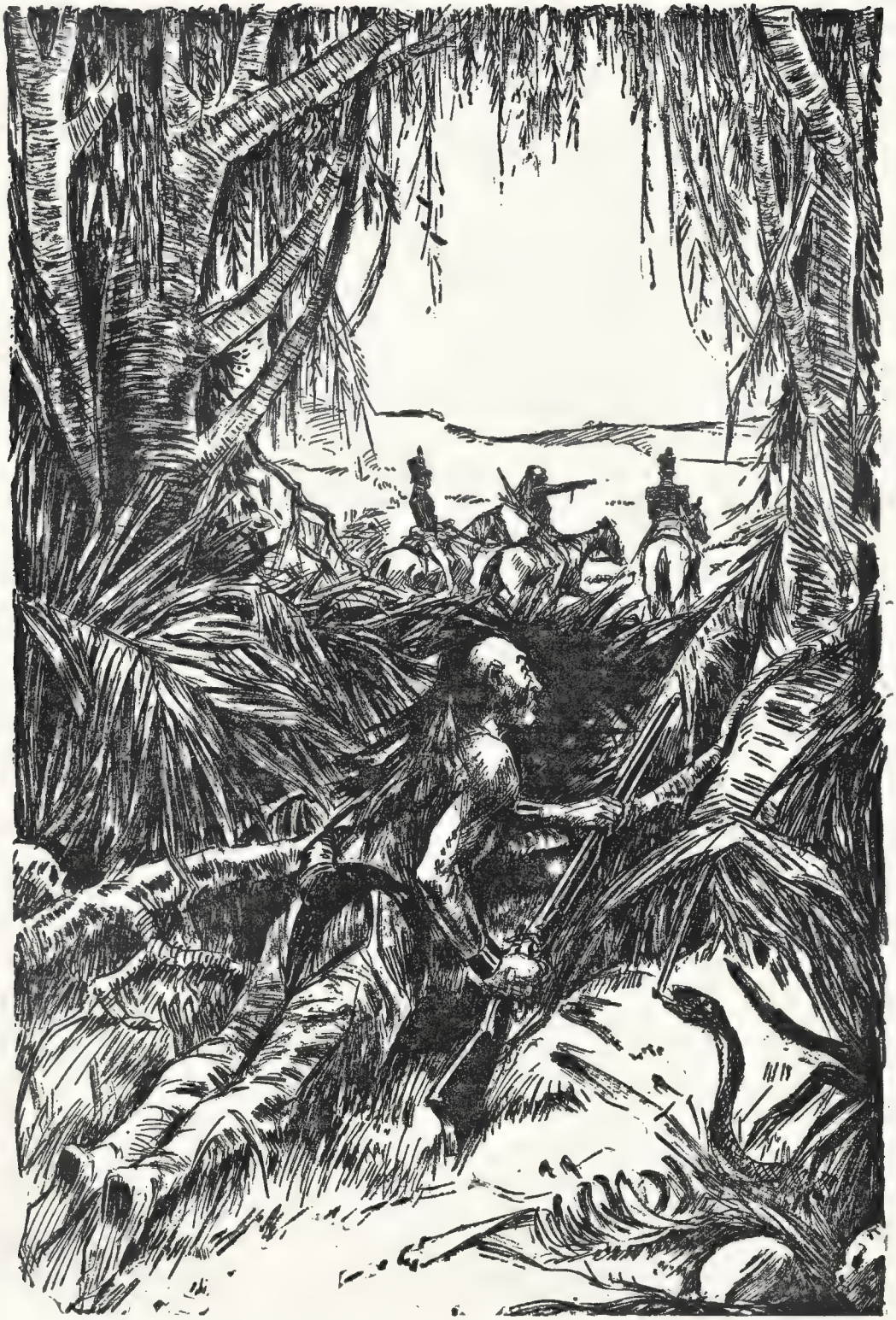
Carter came back to reality with a painless bump. As always, it was refreshing to remember how competently a sergeant can run most wars. Especially an Indian war where rule-of-thumb must take the place of West Point punctilio. Observing the manners of his commanding officer, Carter had learned to forget punctilio long ago. Especially when he was alone with Grady.

"Just when did you decide it was worth the risk, Sergeant?"

"First time I talked to 'Ola, sir. There's no swamp-fire in his eyes, and they don't shift. Show me an Indian who don't bear grudges, and I'll show you the man of tomorrow. Holahte Emathla's that kind of Indian, sir. A good egg from a bad nest. Take that day on the Withlacoochee when you killed his brother—"

Carter turned back sharply from his contemplation of the Matanzas. He had all but forgotten that pitched battle three years ago, when the hostilities, nested in palmetto clumps across the chocolate-dark creek, had proved that Indians can shoot as well as whites, when the whites are obliging enough to offer them perfect targets. He had led the flanking attack himself, after the militia had tried to storm across the Withlocoochee. He could close his eyes now and feel the warm tug of the creek-water at his armpits as he floundered to the far bank, his sword in his teeth. In those days, he had been fresh from the Point, and operatic enough to lead an advance with a sword.

"I remember now," he said. "There were three of them that day . . . " He opened his eyes on that picture: Hadjo (whom the Sem-



inoles called Black Dirt) screaming from the palmettoes to stop a derringer-bullet; Halek Tustenuggee, who was the youngest of the three brothers, charging to battle with a live diamond-back coiled on one wrist—a gesture that had earned him his nickname through the bitter years that followed. Holahte Emathla had taken no part in the action. 'Ola (he remembered that part only too well) had gone out from the white lines before the battle began, to beg his brothers to surrender.

Later, when the Seminoles had left their dead behind and melted into the swamps, Holahte Emathla had gone to plead with them again. This time, a truce had been agreed upon. Promises and gifts had been exchanged, before the Seminoles retired to the south. Only Halek Tustenuggee had held aloof from the parley. . .

Grady spoke softly, echoing Carter's thought once again. "'Course, I won't say that 'Ola has forgiven you. But he don't hate you for pistoling his brother in fair fight. Diamond-Back is another story. If we hadn't heard he'd jumped to Cuba, I'd stay clear of this treasure-hunt—"

Carter nodded, his mind deep in the past. In a way, Halek Tustenuggee summed up all the bitterness of the war; if his name stuttered on the tongue, the enigma of his mind was no easier to unravel. Diamond-Back was easier on the tongue—and easier to understand. A sleek brown snake, a ritualistic pattern of hate, slipping into white country to leave death behind. . . A diamond-back rattler, coiled and waiting. Halek Tustenuggee had crept through a dozen picket-lines on just such errands. Next morning, a soldier would be found dead under an army wagon, with the mark of snake's fangs on his body. Sometimes the dead snake would still be coiled within the soldier's blanket, crushed in their mute struggle between sleep and waking.

Now—if they could believe their reports—Diamond-Back had left the Floridas for Cuba, rather than risk another truce. The price on his head had mounted rapidly. Answering Grady's unspoken query, Carter knew that his capture would be better news to the general than the discovery of English bullion.

Carter said slowly, "I don't believe you, Sergeant. You'd rather hunt Diamond-Back than treasure, any day."

"Not if he knew we were coming, sir."

"So you think this is all a trap. That 'Ola would—"

"I don't *think* when it comes to Indians, Captain. All I can say is, I feel that 'Ola is honest."

Diamond-Back ghosted into the miasma of wild grape in time to watch Captain John Carter, Sergeant Grady and Chief Holahte Emathla ride from the St. Johns' ford to the Seminole village beyond.

"But we could walk into a trap in spite of 'Ola, is that it?"

"Would you risk it, sir, if we had an outside chance of bringing in Diamond-Back?"

"Wouldn't you, Grady?"

The sergeant smiled. Once more, Carter asked himself if Grady was too stolid to be afraid of anything that walked, or too clever to show his fear.

"I've already packed the saddle-bags," said Grady. "Will the captain report his decision to the general?"

Carter permitted himself to answer Grady's smile as the latter came to attention. The sergeant always took refuge in formality—after his point was made.

"First, we'll report to Chief Holahte Emathla," said Carter. "Remember, he's still the Army's guest."

THE cypress hammock was oven-hot that afternoon, and hottest of all where the jungle fell away at the clearing's edge. Here, on higher ground, the hump of hill that rose almost to the tree-tops seemed to quiver with a smouldering life of its own. From the air, this Indian burial-ground would have seemed like a giant green wart in the furry green of the jungle floor; science, in a more tranquil age, would exclaim over it in muted ecstasy, remarking that this was a relic from history's dawn. A sarcophagus for warriors who had hunted on the peninsula ages before the Mickasukie or the Seminole. A mausoleum for chiefs. . . The wide green platform before it was the resting-place for the common braves. Most of these shallow barrow-graves had been washed out by time. The exposed bones, grouped in the studied pattern of death, still gleamed whitely in the encroaching tangle of dog-fennel and wild grape.

The Seminole nation (which usually buried its dead above ground, in wooden frames) had marked the spot on bark maps generations ago. Holahte Emathla was only repeating a tribal legend when he had said that the "Swamp of the Dead" was haunted ground. Hunting was permitted, as far as the trail which curved through the swamp some miles to the west. Only one Indian in the nation would have ventured east of that invisible line—and he was now seated on the green mat of grass before the mound, with his eyes fastened on the mouth of a shallow cave at its base.

Science would have given that cave a more than passing glance; science might even have muttered a curse in its beard and noted that some recent visitor had not hesitated to profane this mass grave for a reason all his own. The Indian (he had heard of science, and spat at the name, as a part of the white man's magic) sat quiet as a stone before the dark opening, and listened to a rustling within.

Presently his lips framed a soundless whistle; his body swayed gently back and forth, as though responding to a rhythm of its own devisiting. The rhythm increased, as a long, dust-brown shape glided from darkness to sun. Wiser, perhaps, that some scientists of his era, the Indian knew that snakes cannot hear. The cobra responds to the dip of the fakir's body, not to the fakir's pipe. . . The diamond-back rattler undulating slowly toward the figure at the cave's mouth had responded to the same stimulus.

The snake lifted its wedge-shaped head slightly, as the man extended his naked arm. The eyes, slitted brown sparks above the darting tongue, dwelt carefully on the eyes above it before the dusty body quivered and moved forward. The arm fanned downward slowly, and the diamond-back's eight feet of rippling tension bunched instantly, about to coil for a strike. Then, as the rhythmic swaying began once more, the snake reared in earnest to make the first loop about the copper flesh. Arm and snake-belly flashed together in the sunlight, both gleaming with their own strength—the man's arm a sleek red-brown, the snake's dorsal muscles yellow as a corpse's skin, yet hideously vibrant.

The rattles flicked the dust as the man swung the diamond-back clear of the ground, and brought the evil wedge of head within an inch of his own. For a long moment, the eyes of Indian and reptile locked in a calm double appraisal. The man's free hand lifted, to stroke the snake gently. Then the fingers dropped into the leather pouch at his side. A slight commotion within told the snake what was coming. The rattler dropped gracefully to the earth as the Indian tossed a squeaking field-mouse on the ground between them.

The small bunch of fur froze instantly to the sun-baked earth under the rattler's relentless stare. The Indian drew back and folded his arms. His expression did not change as the snake coiled easily and struck—a fluid hammer-blow—until the great hooked fangs were bared, needle-sharp, and slavering-white, a silhouette of death in a nightmare. The small, terror-ridden squeal was part of the pattern. Halek Tustenuggee, squatting tailor-fashion in a welter of clean-washed bones, reached into the pouch again, to toss the diamond-back a second reward.

So far, the Indian's gestures had seemed pure ritual, including the gentle backward waving of both hands that returned the snake to its cave at last. Now he rose leisurely, and turned to the wall of jungle hammock that surrounded his sanctuary. Walking quietly on the balls of his feet, he swung himself from burial-mound to cypress knee and ghosted into the miasma of wild grape. Only an Indian's ears would have marked the thud of horses' hooves to the west. Only a renegade who had earned his nickname could weave noiselessly toward the trail, in time to watch Captain John Carter, Staff Sergeant Grady, and Chief Holahte Emathla ride from the St. Johns' ford toward the Seminole village beyond.

CHAPTER II

SWAMP OF THE DEAD

THE map, reflected Carter, seemed real enough, right down to the last crack in the faded parchment. Any amateur cartographer could locate the positions instantly: the wide, tortuous kinks of the river to the East, the wet prairie that merged with Twelve Mile Hammock beyond, the clearing where he was seated now. Even the precise flourish of the Spanish notations belonged to the right century. It was absurd of him to doubt it, now that he was deep in Indian country; to swallow the wild pound of his heart, and ask himself if this were a well-made stage device, designed to lure him to his doom.

Certainly, their welcome at the Indian village had left something to be desired. He stared out at it now, from the high platform of the Chief's house. The high-stilted huts made a half-circle around the common-house, a palmetto thatch open on four sides to the sun and wind. Here, in normal times, the squaws would hug wooden bowls between their knees, pounding flour from corn and coontie-root; here, starveling dog and razor-back would quarrel, and round-headed children would play. Here, in short, would be the village life of the Indian, a thing of high-spirited gaiety far removed from story-book pictures.

Today, as the afternoon sun waned, the village was empty and echoing with the implications of that emptiness. The Indians had waited, right enough, when he and Grady had ridden in with 'Ola from the St. Johns' ford; Waxie Emathla, who was 'Ola's half-brother, had shepherded them toward their Chief in a body, until they had noticed the two army uniforms. . . Then, in a concerted movement that held more of contempt than of menace, the tribal unit had melted into the palmetto scrub, down to the last sturdy toddler. Only Waxie Emathla had remained, and he had stepped forward promptly, to take his half-brother's bridle. In another moment, the Chief and his deputy had joined the exodus. Grady, with a quick wink for Carter, had kicked his own mount into a canter, and followed the whorl of dust that marked their trail in the scrub.

So far, of course, there was no real cause for alarm. The Seminoles had decided to hold their pow-wow in the scrub, that was all, away from an officer's ears. Grady, as that officer's deputy, would be permitted to attend, as a "sense-bearer". . . The censure of their Chief (who

had gone to Augustine as a voluntary hostage, rather than join in war) would come later. In the meantime, the captain's own course was optional. He might sit in the saddle until Grady returned, and prove that he was unafraid by preserving an iron front. Better still, he might exercise the privilege of rank, climb the ladder to the Chief's hut, and await Grady's report in comfort.

The map, as 'Ola had promised them in Augustine, was nailed to the first cross-beam, awaiting his attention. Waxie Emathla, it seemed, had been a faithful deputy to that extent, at least.

Carter glanced again at the notebook on his knee. His translation of the Spanish inscription was more accurate than elegant, but it had the virtue of simplicity:

The live-oak in the clearing, one-and-one-half leagues S. by S.W. from the King's ford on the river.

Blaze-marks will show the shortest route in the fens, which the Indians call the Swamp of the Dead because of the ancient Indian burial ground. If time has wiped out the markings, the Mound may be reached by taking bearings from the oak, one league from where the swamp and pine barren join. If the oak still stands, the bearing is due east. If not, the distance will vary a league or more.

Bullion will be found under the coquina slab, in the cave which I formed with my own hands at the base of the Mound.

Juan Serpa, anno domini 1771

There was nothing cryptic here, as legends go. Why, then, should it arouse his suspicions to find the great oak still standing in the village clearing, complete with a dim blaze-mark pointing straight into the swamp to the east? Blaze-marks will last in bark, if they are made by skillful hands. The live oak had spread its green canopy over this earth when the first crusade was preached. Why should Juan Serpa doubt that it would be anything but wilderness today? Knowing the Seminole's respect for haunted ground, why should he doubt that his treasure would remain untouched?

Across the clearing to the west, the palmetto stirred. Carter glanced up as a long-legged Indian boy took a step into the clearing, favored him with a thoroughly sullen stare, and vanished into the green thicket again. Perhaps the pow-wow was ended now; perhaps the boy had merely been sent to check on the officer's whereabouts. Knowing the Seminole ways, Carter could assume that Grady was at least alive. Death could have struck silently enough behind those green fans; death could have found him, too, as he sat there in full view on the platform. He had, in fact, exposed himself deliberately, to show he was not afraid, just as Grady had ridden into the pow-wow without asking permission.

Bullion will be found under the coquina slab in the cave at the base of the Burial Mound, *read the inscription on the old map.*

He sat grimly on under the sun-faded thatch of the Chief's roof, daring the silence to creep closer and strike. The half-circle of empty huts stared back at him, unreal as a colored plate in some graybeard's history of the world. For no reason at all, they reminded him of cavemen's huts in the dim dawn of time, when man raised his knuckles from the earth at long last, and crept down from the mountainside to carve his destiny in the jungle. . . That sullen stare he had just received fitted in the picture, of course. The distrust of the wild thing for the invader from another, and presumably gentler, world.

Not that that other world had always been gentle, from the Seminoles' point-of-view. He remembered the melee on the bank of the Withlacoochee when Hadjo had died at his own pistol-point, the wolf-iliad, straining hand-to-hand in the dusty palmettoes, the red stain in the dark water, the scalps taken on both sides. An impartial observer could hardly have separated white from savage that afternoon. There had been other afternoons like that, in the long man-hunt that followed. History would group them later, in a chapter on the Indian Wars. Perhaps, if his eyes were sharp enough, he might even find his name in a footnote.

It was part of a pattern, unfortunately. Part of the itch for empire to which even a democ-

racy must yield, as it feels its strength. Under that impetus, the Indian must go. East of the Mississippi, for a starter. Andy Jackson had said it, in so many words, and the heirs of Old Hickory had carried out his dictum. Cherokee, Creek, and Chickashaw—and now, the Seminole. Push the red men West, and make his land safe for the homesteader. When the West was opened, too, the job of attrition could begin in earnest. He could leave that strategy to the empire-builders of tomorrow.

In the meantime, he could hardly blame that boy in the scrub if he were flexing a bow-string now and preparing to send an arrow singing toward the white captain's heart. This was no time for an unofficial ambassador in uniform. He could hardly blame Holahte Emathla if he failed to keep his braves from Grady's throat, and his own. Straddling two worlds, 'Ola understood too much—and too little. Only the bayonet and the transport remained, if he could not sway these minds with his example, and his words. . . Carter glanced up sharply as Grady strode serenely across the clearing, and felt his tension vanish under the sergeant's smile.

"YOU don't look happy, sir," said Grady. "I wonder why."

Carter vaulted to the ground. He knew that his grin was only a sickly imitation of Grady's. Still, it was something to be able to grin at all, at this precise moment.

"Sorry, I've been a sitting target too long. Are they watching us now?"

"I shouldn't wonder, sir. From three sides, at least."

"Tell me what they decided—"

"Maybe you'd better tell me *your* decision first, sir," said Grady, with a respectful glance at the map still in Carter's fist. "It might tie in better."

Carter handed over the map without a word. The sergeant took it from his hand with a crisp heel-click, for the benefit of those watching eyes in the scrub.

"Looks quite in order to me, sir."

"You think it's genuine, then?"

"Right down to Serpa's signature."

"You think we should follow the directions?"

"Isn't that what we came for, Captain?"

Captain and sergeant faced one another in their bright new uniforms. With a hundred hostile eyes fixed upon them, they knew that their bearing must be beyond reproach. Carter spread the map on a tree-stump, and parted the tails of his dress-coat before he sat to study it in detail. Remembering that the Seminoles can read lips, he pulled the visor of his cap a trifle lower, throwing his face into grateful shadow.

"What d'you think we'll find at that Indian mound, Sergeant?"

"Gold, sir," said Grady. "I'm a trusting soul."

"Could we ride back without risking it—and come later, in force?"

"I'm afraid not, Captain. You see, that's what they're afraid we'll do."

Carter frowned, keeping his visor low and his eyes on the map. "So they think we don't trust them?"

"They're sure we don't," said Grady calmly. "Any more than they trust us. It's a matter between 'Ola and them. They were still blaming him for letting us come this far when they sent me back to you."

A procession of red ants marched solemnly across the yellowed map. Carter watched them, letting the silence build and knowing that silence, or inaction, would be fatal if prolonged.

"Do they think 'Ola is on our side or theirs."

"Right now, they aren't quite sure. They only know what he promised us, what we came to do. We must do it their way—or not at all."

Carter pushed back his visor, and let his chin come up with the gesture. He brought his voice up, too, hoping it would carry beyond the screen of palmettoes, hoping that Waxie Emathla, at least, could grasp a little English. Waxie Emathla, he gathered, might prove as slippery as his name.

"What is the nation's will?"

"The nation's hunting ground ends at the St. Johns," said Grady. "We must be over the river at moonrise."

Carter glanced one last time at the map. A great deal, he saw, depended on the accuracy of Juan Serpa's memory. If it was only a league to the Indian mound, they could enter the swamp, and emerge again, with time to spare—providing they were not detained en route. He faced the chance squarely, feeling his mind harden with purpose. If the Seminoles had meant to murder them out-of-hand, they would have moved long ago. The fact that they were still alive proved that suspicion had not yet deepened into blood-lust.

"What else?"

"Our horses will be waiting at the ford," said Grady. "We must leave our carbines in the saddle-boots." He pulled down the blue sleeves of his dress-coat carefully, and lifted his arms to show that his belt was empty of weapons. Carter paralleled the gesture.

"We do not come to insult the graves of warriors," he said carefully. "We come only to take away the insult another has left there." Hesitating only a moment over the derringer in the bosom of his dress-coat, he tossed the coat itself aside, and the cambric shirt beneath. Naked to the waist now, he managed to smile at Grady in earnest, and wondered why the sergeant, usually so apt a monkey, had not followed his example.

"May we take a cane-knife to cut our way?"

"The map tells us the trail is marked," said Grady.

"Very well, Sergeant. What are we waiting for?"

He made a brave show of squaring his shoulders as he walked toward the oak tree, and hoped his knees would steady. Grady followed at a respectable three paces, and paused, as Carter marked the direction of the blaze. His mind, Carter discovered, was steadier than his unpredictable legs. He could even admire the deep, clean gash in the bole of the tree—and pray that it had really been made by Juan Serpa's hand a lifetime ago.

The palmettoes whispered when he turned at last to the down-slope that led to the swamp. Brown bodies seeped into the clearing from three sides, like a slow flood converging on the two white men under the oak-leaves. Carter saw that only a few of the braves were in war-paint. These, he surmised, were the die-hards; the others (arms folded on their chests, palms down) were the fence-sitters, waiting to put the white man to the test. The fact that squaws and children had come into the open was another hopeful sign. He felt his heart bound with hope, but swallowed his optimism firmly. After all, there were three miles of wild-grape to cut through before they could really breathe again.

Holahte Emathla stepped forward with the air of a man who held time suspended in his hand. 'Ola's Spanish, Carter noted, was as resonant as ever, the rolling consonants uncolored by doubt.

"Until moonrise, Captain, at the ford."

"Until moonrise, *jefe*—"

"No later, Captain."

"No later, *jefe*."

The Seminole raised one hand, palm outward, a gesture of peace, older than the spoken word. Carter responded, letting his eyes sweep the silent half-circle of faces. It was part of the ritual, of course; so essential a part, that he had no time to feel ridiculous. None of the braves responded, save the would-be killers with the painted cheeks. All of these spat in unison, as Carter turned again with Grady at his heels. Feeling the sharp bite of the sun on his bare shoulderblades, and the itch between that waited for the sharper bite of an arrow, he balanced his compass in his palm, and plunged into the swamp.

There was a single war-whoop behind them, silenced instantly by a sharp command from Holahte Emathla. Pricking up his ears as he walked toward the next blaze, Carter heard the slap of bare feet in the clearing, and knew that the Indian village had taken up its normal life again. A few of the braves would keep watch at the swamp's edge, to make sure that the white men continued due east; the Chief would go back to his house, now that the crisis had passed, to begin his long argument with the family heads regarding their coming removal to the West.

CARTER spoke without turning, as he plunged on. Grady, the born woodsman, could mark the trail when they were deeper in the swamp. Protocol still demanded that he lead the way, until the village was out of sight.

"Was that close enough to suit you, Sergeant?"

"We've been closer to death and lived, sir."

"I didn't ask you that. How many were for letting us go?"

"Nearly all, Captain. Didn't you count the war-bonnets?" Grady chuckled, as he leveled a finger at the next blaze. "'Course, they had method in their madness. 'Ola's the only man in the tribe who thinks we'll come out alive."

"Say that again, Sergeant. Slowly, please."

Grady let his laughter boom in earnest, now that they were out of earshot of the village. "Why d'you think they call this the Swamp of the Dead, sir?"

"Right now, I wouldn't dare wonder."

"It's really simple, Captain. Those aren't Seminoles in that burying-ground. Compared to those Indians, the Seminoles are tenderfeet in this wilderness."

"Go on, Grady," said Carter. He stepped back a pace, making no attempt to match the sergeant's grin this time. "And while you're about it, you might lead the way."

"They brought back the priest," said Grady. "*He* dropped dead this side of the trail. 'Course, he was an old man—well over seventy, according to 'Ola. They'll expect us to reach the mound before the spirits of the departed strike us down. If you ask me, sir, they'll be happy to let us rot there."

Carter felt cold sweat prickle his shoulderblades. He took a long bound forward, and anchored a fist in the sergeant's belt.

"Why didn't you tell me this sooner?"

"Sorry, sir. Afraid it might spoil your performance. Seminoles are sticklers for ceremony, you know. Once they've made up their minds to let us die a certain way, we couldn't disappoint 'em." The sergeant plunged on, as Carter relaxed his hold, with all the eagerness of a boy on his first hunting-trip. "Too bad you dropped that derringer, sir. I'd feel a mite easier if we had it along."

"Have you any idea what's waiting for us at that mound?"

"No idea at all, sir. That's why I'm hurrying to find out. Anchor on if you like, Captain. I brought you this far—I can tow you to the end."

Carter replied by cuffing the sergeant's ear. "I've stalked an ambush before, you know."

"Lead the way if you like, sir," said Grady. "This one will take real stalking."

Watching the sergeant leap to the next cypress with all the ease of a carefree monkey, Carter marveled once again at Grady's accept-

ance of danger as part of his day's routine; at the ready wit that always improvised an attitude, even when the threat was nameless. . . Well, he could use that talent today, to the hilt. He waved the sergeant on, when Grady paused in a rare patch of sunlight ahead, and looked back for the next command.

"It's your party, Sergeant. I'll take orders, until we're out of here."

Until we're out of here. Carter mused. *If* might be a better word, he reflected, hearing the slow, sure throb of a war-drum from the village behind them. One of the die-hards, setting up his own personal counterpoint to the Chief's pow-wow. The lazy insistence of the drum-beat was joined by a second drum, and then a third. Ghosting after Grady into the deeper shade of the hammock, Carter waited for the rhythm to swell into a chorus. . . 'Ola's got his hands full, he told himself, and wondered if they would find their horses waiting for them tonight. Always assuming they got that far, now that they had stepped over the border-land of the ancient dead.

CHAPTER III

THE SERPA TROVE

WALLOWING slowly forward in swamp-muck, nursing the last scrap of cover in the dog-fennel, Carter checked the flat green opening between the cypress boles one last time. Grady, he knew, was giving the burial ground a careful inspection from the other side. Both of them had whisked through the last quarter-mile of jungle with all the tricks in the sergeant's bag. They had divided forces just before they reached the mound, after making sure that it was a simple cumulus ringed by those mourning ghosts of cypresses. Certainly there was no hidden ambush here: the shallow scoop at the base of the mound, speared by a long ray of sun from the west, was too small to hide even an African pygmy.

Carter wriggled into the very edge of the dog-fennel, letting his eye sweep the wrecks of a hundred barrow-graves, on the flat surface beyond. Waiting impatiently for Grady's signal, he felt the tension melt at the base of his brain. With each passing second, it seemed more evident that the guardians of the Serpa trove were ghosts—and ghosts alone.

A genuine mocking-bird, bent on amorous dalliance in the wild grape, poured out its full-throated music a fraction ahead of Grady. Carter smiled, as the sergeant improved on nature with his own bird-call, then laughed aloud, as the mocker circled above the ancient burial-ground, and darted down at the sergeant's own hiding-place, in search of a highly improbable mate. Then, rising calmly in a luxury of relaxing limbs, he walked toward the mound with all the restrained calm of an antiquarian who has come into his own. Grady, he knew, would stay hidden until he had made this final physical check. It seemed a needless precaution now.

At first, he made a conscious effort to walk between the graves. Most of the bones, he noted, had crumbled to dust long ago. Washed out by the rains of a forgotten century, baked in an eon or two of pitiless sun, they blended grayly with the earth about them. Here and there, he noted a crude weapon in the crook of a bony elbow, an outline of a spear, an earthen pot, even a necklace or two—reminders that these aborigines, too, had buried weapons and ornaments with their dead.

The mound was more durably made. Touching its lichened surface, Carter saw that it was a great, conical mass of coquina, dusted over with earth and moss. Chiefs and headmen, he realized, were buried here, and he wondered how the coquina had come across the miles of prairie from the coast, to protect their last resting-place. Here and there, of course, the stone had cracked under the ruthless pressure of the jungle: the shallow scoop that presumably Serpa had made had actually been started by a lusty blue-gum root that had insinuated itself between two of the porous slabs. Carter could still mark the outlines of the roots, as he bent closer to study the contour of the opening. . .

Someone was spinning a nightmare top in the chiaroscuro, he reflected—a brown, coiled threat, dominated by two hot sparks that dared him to venture closer. Carter did not accept the dare, years of campaigning in the scrub made his reflex automatic. A quick leap backward, swiveling his body to the right, just as the diamond-back struck. For one tight moment, he thought the fangs had joined in his leg, just where the jack-boot ended. Then he saw that the snake's whole length had whiplashed past, with a safe three inches to spare.

Back in the safety of the open graves again, he was not too squeamish about using a pair of skulls as stepping-stones, until he had gained a square of solid earth just inside the cypress ring. The rattler, after its unsuccessful strike, had already rustled back to its den; a dry, indignant rustle, like the whisper of sunless leaves. Carter turned slowly, in response to an almost identical rustle from the dead cypress to his right. The eyes that watched him now were human, though they held the same hot brown sparks of hatred.

At first, he wasn't at all sure where man ended and tree began. The hollow in the dead bole was high enough for the Indian to stand erect, and deep enough to conceal him completely while he stood motionless. In that flash of recognition, Carter saw that this graveyard sentry was concealed from Grady, still awaiting

his signal to advance from the thicket. Not that Grady could help much now. Unarmed as he was, he could hardly cancel out the threat of a doubled-barreled rifle cradled in one copper arm.

The Indian spoke softly, in quick, bad Spanish. "An honest enemy, the rattlesnake. At least, he gives warning before he kills."

"True enough, Diamond-Back." Carter's voice was not quite his own. For all that, he was surprised at its steadiness.

"I am pleased you remember me so well, Captain Carter. Pleased, too, that you dared to come this far alone. Where is your sergeant?"

"I left him at the pow-wow to watch the horses."

"Too bad. I would like to meet him, too."

Watching the faint stir within the shell of the cypress, Carter wondered if the lie had gone down, almost as intently as he wondered what Grady was doing in his own tenuous ambush. Then, as the rifle barrel leveled slowly, he knew once again that Grady could not help. . .

The Indian's finger caressed the trigger-guard, without moving to the trigger itself. "In a little while, I am sending you to join my brother, Hadjo. You know that, of course?"

"Of course, Diamond-Back."

"I could not believe my good fortune when I heard that my foolish brother 'Ola was bringing you here."

"How did you know?"

"There are ways of knowing, Captain—of listening from the dark, even when you are banned from the council-fire."

Even with the death's eye sighting down that gun-barrel, Carter found he could rejoice. It was something to know that Holahte Emathla had acted in good faith, that this fantastic ambush was Diamond-Back's inspiration alone. . . He dared to take a step nearer on that thought. After all, he was certain enough that the Seminole's plans for his death involved a time-lag, designed for Diamond-Back's exclusive pleasure.

"How long have you waited?"

"For weeks I have made my camp beside this mound, Captain. It is the one place where I am safe from my people."

"It surprises me to hear you are an outcast."

The Seminole's voice was a mere ghostly whisper now. "It is the price all warriors pay who fight too long."

"I think I understand," said Carter. "Does that surprise you?" He had played this solmen game before, in endless parleys. Now that his life was in the balance, it was something to remember the Indian's pleasure in self-dramatization.

"Do you understand that my people beat the war-drums now to soothe their craven hearts? That they are afraid to fight any longer for what is theirs? That a man like you can come into the nation to hunt gold, and go out alive?" The Seminole was swaying gently now in the frame of dead cypress, as though responding to an inner frenzy. For a moment, his lips pursed, as though emitting a soundless whistle. "Can I let you live after that, even if we had no score to settle?"

The gun-muzzle was a scant yard from Carter's forehead now. He kept his eyes on the twin menaces of the shining bores, fought down an urge to dive below them, and smash the copper dervish where he stood. Diamond-Back was swaying like a red aspen gone berserk; his eyes, darting past Carter's shoulder, were fixed on a point beyond. Now they whipped back again, just as Carter was gathering his forces for a plunging tackle.

"Look behind you, Captain. You will see that I am well-named by my enemies."

CARTER whirled to the hideous slithering rustle. The diamond-back had emerged from its den, and was writhing toward them across the welter of bones. A full-grown rattler can move with incredible speed, when the stimulus is right; Carter saw instantly that the Indian had supplied the exact incentive, with an atavistic flourish all his own. Snake and man were one, in that barbaric rhythm. Carter scarcely had time to freeze in his tracks before the giant reptile had writhed past, reared magnificently against the cypress bole, and coiled its whole dusty length about Diamond-Back's arm. With his gesture of acceptance, Diamond-Back switched the rifle to his free shoulder, with Carter still in the sights.

The Seminole's voice was vibrant. "These are my friends now, Captain." He took a step forward, offering the snake's head to Carter as a man might brandish a leaded whip. "Will you choose between us?"

The pattern was complete, now. He *wants* me to turn and run, thought Carter. He thinks I'd prefer a bullet in my back to that brute's fangs. . . For all his resolve, he found that he had backed away a step before Diamond-Back's advance.

"As you like, Captain. Shall I leave you together in the cave? Perhaps you'll still have time to search out your gold?"

The snake's head flashed before Carter's eyes, darting smoothly forward and retracing with the same insolent grace. A musky reek sent his senses swimming, but his eyes stayed riveted to the reptile's slaty stare. For all that, he marked the discoloration of a small ulcer beside the brute's low-hung jaw, the convulsive throb of the throat-muscles as Diamond-Back spoke to it in Seminole. . . There was a faint fleck of moisture about the slowly distending jaws now, as Diamond-Back's arm rose head-high. In that flash, Carter remembered the wolf-iliad at the Withlacoochee, and the young

subaltern he had found among the dead, with needle-sharp punctures at his throat, his face a sodden purple.

Something whined through the still air above them. A blinding blue flash that grazed the reptile's back, and quivered home in the cypress behind them. Carter was still staring, as the great wedged head whipped down. Distracted from its original object, its rage turned on the man who held it. The snake struck at Diamond-Back's arm.

It had happened too quickly for thought. Still rooted to the spot, Carter saw the rifle flip back into the cypress in a gleaming arc. Diamond-Back was writhing among the dead leaves now, working with both hands to pry the fangs from flesh. For a moment, snake and man made an identical blind thrashing within the cypress; then the rattler looped into the sunlight with a broken back. Scarcely knowing what he did, Carter flung himself upon the gleaming mass, and smashed its head against the bleached skull.

Remembering then that his real adversary was only wounded, he plunged for cover—in this case, the nearest barrow. Diamond-Back had already staggered blindly from the hollow cypress, without noting the dying quiver of the knife just above his head. Stumbling a little, with the gun held low, he ran out among the graves in search of Carter.

Grady had popped out of the scrub at last, to dodge cat-quick behind the cypress. From his own tenuous hideaway, Carter watched the sergeant pry his knife from the cypress bark, and set himself for another pitch. The twin bores of the rifle wavered, then steadied, as they found their target. Wallowed eye-deep in the dusty hollow of the earth, Carter saw the Indian brace himself to fire, saw Grady whisk from sight behind the cypress without risking a throw.

Carter was on his feet now, running with his arms held low, and aching to close with that copper flesh at last. Grady stopped him with a shouted order, and all but teased Diamond-Back into risking a shot as he plunged for the dog-fennel. Sergeant and shoulder-tall weeds had merged in that flash. It was Carter's turn to whisk behind the cypress, as Diamond-Back staggered in pursuit, flailing his gun-butt like a club among the weeds. He watched the naked red chest working in a vain search for air. The Indian staggered into the open again, clutching blindly at his temples, and leaving a smear of red as his hands dropped limply. Grady rose up on that, like Nemesis out of the green weeds. The bone-handled knife lay easily in his palm, and rested there. No one stirred as a bow-string twanged in the deeper green of the jungle behind them. No one but Diamond-Back, who spun crazily on his toes, and pitched head-foremost into a shallow grave with an arrow in his throat.

GRADY turned the Indian's body over, and stared down thoughtfully at the broken arrow-shaft.

"Don't blame that on me, sir. *His* aim was better—whoever he was."

Carter saw that the sergeant was scarcely winded, and studied him for a wordless moment. Oddly enough, it was Grady's eternal grin that held him now, rather than the body between them.

"'Course, in a way, it's an arrow wasted," said Grady. "With that snake-juice in his blood, he'd 'a dropped anyhow. Matter of minutes, if you ask me. But maybe our friend didn't know that—"

They turned in unison to stare at the wall of jungle hammock to the west. Here in the clearing, the cypress boles had begun to turn gray with evening. Farther west, where the hammock opened into a deer-run, the wild grape flamed with the leveling sun. There was no stir of life in the pattern of dusty green. Even the mocker, frightened by the melee, had winged elsewhere in search of love.

"Maybe I'm wrong," said Grady. "Maybe that arrow was aimed at one o' us. We'll find out, sir, when we go look for our horses."

Carter found his voice, and cursed, in a hoarse croak. "Did you know we'd be trailed?"

"No, sir—word of honor. I thought this was our job, to the finish. That's why I kept my sleeve turned down on the knife." The sergeant weighed the heavy bowie-knife in one palm, and stared down regretfully at what was left of Diamond-Back. "I'd give an eye-tooth for his hair, Captain."

"Put that knife away, Grady." His authority, Carter found, had returned with his voice. "Remember, we came here on another errand."

"Right you are, sir. I'd almost forgotten, what with *his* mumbo-jumbo." Carter didn't protest, when the sergeant walked away a few paces, to hack off the snake's rattlers. "Considerin' it was Diamond-Back, sir, you might say this is nearly as good as a scalp."

They walked toward the burial-mound in silence. It was beginning to gray now, too, as the shadows lengthened. To Carter's eye, it resembled nothing so much as a skull that had been left out too long in the rain. The scoop that Juan Serpa's spade had hollowed might well be a submerged eye-socket. . . He pushed the thought aside, and handed Grady a lucifer. The sergeant bunched a mass of dead dog-fennel, and thrust the oily flame into the hollow.

"Thought that side-winder might have a mate, sir. Guess he outlived his wives."

Carter let out his breath sharply as Grady's torch picked out the hollow. It was the precise spot that Serpa had mentioned in his map.

Carter let out his breath sharply as the torch picked out the coquina slab, upended now, beside a deeper hollow that had already begun to sprout a few lusty weeds. This was the precise spot that Serpa had mentioned in his map; there could be no other. He closed his eyes on the sting of the smoke, picturing the leaded cask that had filled this hollow not so long ago, the sweating copper muscles that had strained through a hot mid-day to lift that cask from its hiding place. Diamond-Back, it seemed, had won a triumph of sorts, even in death.

Grady dropped the torch, and laughed aloud. "Come out of it, sir. We were hunting a bad Indian first, and money second. The Treasury in Washington can pay its debts without us. It can always print money—"

"He *must* have hidden it near here, Grady," Carter insisted, as he walked into the open again. Then he burst out in a hoarse echo of Grady's laughter, the sort of specious mirth that hovers just a bit too close to madness for comfort.

"You're right, of course. One thing at a time. Take his hair if you like, Sergeant. The general will want some kind of token—"

"Not this time, sir. Someone else wanted Diamond-Back's hair more than us. Maybe he's waiting out there now to do the job."

They stared one more time at the fast-graying wall of cypress, unstirring as time in the dusk. "Not even an Indian would scalp his own brother," said Carter.

"He might, sir, if the brother was bad enough—if he had a point to make with the headmen."

"Right again, Grady. I think I can find the blazes on the back-track. Do you mind if I lead the way?"

"Not at all, sir. It's only proper, particularly if we're still being watched."

Carter strode into the hammock without a backward glance. Grady weighed his knife in his palm for a last regretful moment, and stared down at Diamond-Back's plaited warlocks. Then he shrugged as only a sergeant can, and followed his commanding officer down the dim jungle trail.

AT EIGHT that summer evening, the St. Johns was a mirror for the moon, a narrow mirror between two walls of cedar and water oak where the river meandered out of the bottleneck of Lake George. Carter reined in at the ford, and waited for Grady to ride up beside him. For the tenth time since they had left the village, he touched the carbine in his saddle-boot to make sure it was real.

"Easy does it, sir. We're home, now."

"Not quite, Sergeant. I still feel we're watched."

"All along the way, Captain," said Grady cheerfully, "even if they did turn their backs on us when we rode out of the village." His tone was tranquil, the voice of a man whose conscience is at rest after a hard day's toil. "Don't you see, sir? We had to be watched every step, to make sure we left the nation on time?"

Carter sat firm in the saddle, watching his calico gelding drink in the shallows of the ford. He had hoped to meet Holahte Emathla at the Chief's house, or along the way, at least. It was intolerable that he should turn his back on tribal territory without a final word.

"Do you think that 'Ola—"

"'Ola's had a hard day too, sir. Don't you worry—he's still alive. Would *we* be here, if he wasn't?"

"*Sí, Capitán.* The sergeant is right. I am very much alive."

It seemed only natural that Holahte Emathla should glide from the heavy blue shadow of an oleander with those whispered words; that he should wade a pace into the shallows, to gentle the gelding's muzzle. The moonlight showed that his eyes were sunken, but his shoulders were as square as ever when he raised his eyes to Carter's.

"I thought it was better, Captain, if I waited here for you."

"You needn't apologize, 'Ola. I'm used to being watched today." Carter managed a grin of sorts, but the Seminole's face was grave. "You needn't explain about the Serpa Trove, either. I believe it was real, now. I don't even mind losing it."

"We will not speak of the gold now, Captain. First, I must tell you why I let you go to the burial-ground." Holahte Emathla swayed a little, and anchored himself with a hand on Carter's saddle-horn.

"You aren't hurt, 'Ola?"

"No, Captain. Not even here—" The Seminole struck a hard fist over his heart. "I knew that my brother was doomed; that time, marching always forward, had left him too far behind. Why should I mourn him tonight?"

The glances of white man and Indian locked for a moment. Grady broke the tension as he chuckled softly in the background.

"So you knew Diamond-Back was in the swamp all along?"

"I suspected it, Sergeant. After all, there was no other place for him to hide."

"And you sent us in as decoys?"

"I had no choice today. My people demanded it, as you know, thinking the ground was cursed by the dead—thinking you could not come out alive"—Holahte Emathla managed a smile at last—"thinking that *I* would share your fate, when I followed you." His voice was calmer now, and surer. "There is much of my two dead brothers in my people, much of the hard heart that does not forgive. . . Perhaps, when we have gone West, we will all learn wisdom."

Carter nodded slowly in the dark. Somehow, he was glad that the trees kept off the moon-

light. He knew that his face did not echo Holahte Emathla's confidence in the curative powers of the West.

The Seminole said, "For now, it is enough for them to see that you are strong. That you could stand face to face with the dead, and come out untouched.

"And you, *jefe*?"

"You have said the word, Captain. I am Chief. I make my own medicine with the living—and the dead."

Grady said easily, "How soon did you follow us?"

"Soon enough to overtake you at the mound, Sergeant. Of course, I could not let you know that I watched. . . When I saw my brother stir in the hollow of the cypress, I knew the revenge he planned. Since his boyhood, he has been the friend of snakes."

"Amen to that," said Grady.

THE Indian's dark, tired eyes lifted again to Carter's. "He would have teased you a long while with that diamond-back, Captain, before he permitted it to strike. That was also his way. . . It was good that the sergeant could save you with his knife—good that my brother was already marked for death when my arrow found him. Tonight, I sleep well on that knowledge."

Holahte Emathla's free hand rose in the dark, to toss a dark object on Grady's pommel. A plaited mass of hair, with a snakeskin woven among the strands. The sergeant lifted it, gave a small, grave bow, then dropped it in his saddle-bag. Then he spoke, deferentially.

"Maybe it *is* mine by right, 'Ola, if you put it that way."

Carter held out his hand, but the Seminole did not take it. Instead, he held up his own hand, palm outward.

"Go with God, *señores*. There is but one thing more—"

Holahte clapped his hands in a brisk signal. No one stirred in the little group when the branches of the oleanders parted, to admit a pack-mule to the shallows, a mule whose heavy load all but splashed in the St Johns. . . The long-legged Seminole boy was at the bridle. He gave Grady a parting scowl, just before he looped the rope at the sergeant's saddle-horn.

Chief Holahte Emathla spoke from the shadows. "Take it, *señores*. It is what you came for, *no es verdad?*" White teeth flashed a brief smile in the dark. "Ten thousand English sovereigns in either bag. On my word, there was no more. . . Perhaps, like most treasure, the Serpa Trove was over-praised. . ."

The voice faded into the blue depths of the leaves. Carter bent down sharply from his saddle to call it back.

"Did you have this from the start?"

"No, Captain. It was in the hollow tree, my brother's sleeping place. Let it speak for me in Washington, *señores*. Go with God."

"Go with God."

On the far bank, the sergeant bit into each of the sovereigns in turn.

"Begging your pardon, sir. But it's nice to bite into something real—after you've gone visiting with ghosts and diamond-backs."

"This little ol' iron hat that I hung onto all the way down came in mighty handy!" O'Toole told them.

THE COLONEL'S POWDERPUFF

By

BURT SIMS

FINKLE THE FAITHFUL, a corporal whose pedigree read, by Boat Ride, out of Brooklyn, was ticking away industriously at the typewriter when The Cork entered his Public Relations Office. Finkle, who always looked as though he had missed three meals hand-running, greeted him with gloomy respect, "Heil, Lootenant."

"The top of a clammy morning to you, Finkle," returned The Cork, hanging up his cap. "What's new an' different?"

Finkle leaned back in the chair. "I jus'

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called duh photo lab." He sighed, and began to recite, "Tidwell is bein' on K.P., Wenholz is bein' on pass—"

"Bell is sick," The Cork guessed bitterly, "an' Landry is on coal detail."

Finkle shook his head. "No, sir—Bell ain't sick. It's Landry. Too much mild-an'-bitter last night. But Bell is okey-doke, an' he'll be over soon's he gets his holders loaded. That won't take long," he added reassuringly, "'cause we're almost outa fillum."

"Hooray, hooray," muttered The Cork. "Eighty-nine million pictures we oughta shoot an' we're almost outa film. That's just dandy." He jammed his hands into his pockets. "What happens to us should be drawn by Disney."

"An' you got a phone call fer ya to answer, Lootenant, Cap'm Fanning, he's got some war correspondent he wantsa send out here."

"A war correspondent?" The Cork brightened, and crossed to the flat-topped table which served as his desk. He reached for the telephone.

"It ain't workin' so good again," Finkle warned him.

"Again?" snorted The Cork. "You mean, yet. Last two times I tried to get Fighter Command they gave me Scotland Yard."

He jiggled the hook until he heard the faint voice of the operator, then placed his call and waited. "It's about time we got a break like this," he told Finkle, who was licking an envelope with obvious distaste. "It means we're about to get nationwide recognition," he continued cheerily. "Treat this guy right, really do a good job, an' the word'll get around. We'll get some big-timers out here. They'll tell the world what a great group we got."

"Yes, sir," replied Finkle.

The Cork read the skepticism in his tone. "You're thinkin' of what happened last time," he accused.

"Yes, sir," Finkle admitted with a pained expression. He sealed the envelope. "Lootenant, alla promotion stories are ready to go. You wanna send out dose mail orderly pictures?"

The Cork nodded. "An' don't forget that Whitaker feature I finished yest—" He sat upright suddenly and buried the telephone receiver in his ear. "Fighter Command?" he bellowed. "Hello! . . . Fighter Command? . . . Who? . . . Who is it? . . . Blightersham!" His face fell. "Sorry," he yelled, "wrong number!"

He jiggled the hook once more as Finkle tsk-tsked sympathetically. "Operator," he began slowly and distinctly, "I wanted Fighter Command . . . Fighter Command . . . F, for fresh eggs, I, for ice cream, G, for—"

"Grant's Tomb," Finkle supplied with nostalgia. "Heil, Brooklyn."

A sudden thought blazed. The Cork flung an arm wide and shouted imperiously, "Get me General Kepner!"

Finkle arose and salaamed three times in solemn appreciation. The Cork winked at him and fumbled for a cigarette. But before he could get his flaring zippo to its tip he heard Fighter Command answering. "Captain Fanning, please!" he shouted. "Fanning . . . Public Rela—*Ow!*"

He hurled the flaming zippo from him and jammed a blistered finger into his mouth. This was of no appreciable aid to his enunciation. He removed his finger and groaned, "Oh, my aching, overtaxed back," and then he heard Fanning's faraway voice.

"Who?" yelled The Cork.

It sounded like Andrews. Si Andrews.

"Who's he with?" hollered The Cork. "Who? . . . Amalgamated Press? . . . Swell! . . . No, I said, swell!" This was getting rough. His lungs hurt. "What time?"

With significance not subtle, Finkle opened a window. The Cork frowned. "Yeah! . . . Yeah! . . . I can't hear—yeah! . . . Two days? . . . I screamed, two—" The connection faded out with two short whistles, one buzz and a dim sputtering.

FINKLE removed his hands from his ears. "Who'd we draw, Lootenant?"

"Some guy name of Andrews. Amalgamated Press." He chewed his pencil. "Can't seem to place him." He laid the pencil down and arose from his chair with a businesslike air. "No matter," he said briskly. "Gotta get busy, Finkle. We'll give him Whitaker. Tear up my feature. We'll treat this guy like royalty. Have him stay in my barracks—"

"Like royalty?" Finkle inquired dubiously.

"Well—it's comfortable, anyway. An' he'll be in there with the pilots, where he can pick up some good human-interest stuff."

Finkle cleared his throat. "Lootenant, you still ain't forgettin'—"

The Cork laughed to cover the prickle of uneasiness that always accompanied that recollection. "That magazine guy? No—but I had a long talk with the boys after that one. They'll behave," he said, hopefully.

Finkle appeared unconvinced. "He didn't like 'em showin' him how a snap-roll works."

"They shouldn't have waited till he was asleep," The Cork admitted.

"An' they shouldn't have dumped him out on the floor an' then fixed his cot so it fell down when he got in it again."

"Well," The Cork explained unhappily, "the guy didn't understand pilots, that's all. He made 'em kind of annoyed. When they're annoyed they do things. You know how it is." His jaw dropped. "Holy aileron! I almost forgot. There was a note in my box for me to see Major Glennie this morning."

"The group adjutant?" inquired Finkle needlessly, there being only one Major Glennie.

"No less," answered The Cork.

"What've we done now?"

"Just because the group adjutant wants to see me, it doesn't mean we're in trouble," The Cork maintained.

"But," Finkle pointed out mercilessly, "it's a good bet."

A man of violent nature, The Cork reflected grimly, would place his hands gently but firmly around the group adjutant's beefy neck, throttle off the flow of heated words, and speak his mind above the torrent of hissing steam.

To be considered, however, were three factors of major importance: one, The Cork was not possessed of a violent nature, except when falling in or out of jeeps; two, the group adjutant was a major; and three, The Cork was a first lieutenant.

"—silliest, most inconsequential piece of business I've ever heard of!" The group adjutant was hurling out each word with the force and directness of a quartet of fifty-calibers. "You will forget the story entirely, Corcoran!"

Great, thought The Cork. Forget a nice, harmless little story when I've been beating my brains out trying to dig up yarns that don't all sound alike. He held the non-committal expression on his angular face, however, and suffered the rest of the blast.

"—particularly that reference to the colonel." Cement funneled onto the major's words and hardened quickly. "Forget it. Forget the whole thing."

"Sir—"

The major's tone jumped half an octave. "Corcoran, there are some things in a man's life which are better left unsaid. Things that

Steaming at full-speed toward the door, The Cork tripped over the fateful canteen—and thus caught the first scent of impending disaster.

go deep and should lie buried there. That's about all I can tell you. Understand?"

Doubtfully, The Cork answered, "Yes, sir." He repressed the desire to commit some field research in plastic surgery. Several changes, he felt, would vastly improve the major's face. The major had no eye for justice, no ear for mercy—and no nose for news. He did have, however, an impatient temper.

"I don't give two whoops and a holler what Fighter Command Public Relations says," the major went on heatedly. "Tell 'em our pilots don't have any superstitions. Tell 'em they don't have any good luck charms!" He ended in a sputtering shout. "Tell 'em we all believe in good fairies!"

In the face of this heavy defensive fire, with nothing to lose, The Cork summoned energy for one last attempt. "Sir, the story really is worthwhile—a good human-interest feature. It's swell for hometown newspapers."

The major glared, and sucked in his breath. The Cork hastily mounted the wings of the true creator and tried to drown objections with a rush of words.

"There's Kornetski's doll that his wife made an' gave him, an' that he's carried on every flight since basic training. An' Bud's thin dime an' Wood's rawhide laces an' O'Toole's derby," he swept on with growing enthusiasm, "an' the colonel's powderpuff—"

"Stop! Stop!" The major scuffed a frantic hand over his balding head and choked as though he had been forced to eat his gold oak leaves. The third "Stop!" strangled him.

The Cork halted abruptly. For a moment made noisy by the major's apopletic gurglings he stared aghast. The major clutched his throat. The Cork smote him a mighty blow between the shoulders, then scooped up the topless canteen sitting on the desk. The major grabbed it blindly, poured its contents into his mouth—then spewed them explosively all over the front of The Cork, who had tried too late to bob out of the way.

The major's eyes, now open, tried to open even wider. "Doctor," he croaked, his arms flailing the air.

Steaming at full speed toward the door, The Cork tripped over the fateful canteen and began to uncoil with hasty grace. Hanging in the air, head down and jacket front sagging, he caught the first scent of disaster.

Trying to dissuade the group adjutant with mere words had been a plausible approach. Not as much could be said for feeding him lighter fluid.

TWO hours later, with his mind shifting into over-drive, The Cork entered the smoky briefing room with Whitaker and his wingman, O'Toole. They eyed the assignment traced with brightly-colored cords across the huge map. The Cork, who was a squadron intelligence officer as well as handling the public relations job for the fighter group, began copying figures from one of the blackboards.

Whitaker, a smooth-faced, bright-eyed boy, grinned at the map. "Good stuff," he said with pleasure. "Lotsa Hermanns."

"Great," responded O'Toole dourly. "The whole Liftwaffle will be up for this one. I dont mind dyin', but I ain't in a helluva hurry."

The Cork handed them cigarettes. "Number Six, today, Whit?"

He grinned again. "Six, maybe seven. No harm in tryin'."

"The hell there ain't," muttered O'Toole.

The Cork looked at them affectionately. "Got a correspondent comin' out from Amalgamated Press this afternoon. I want him to talk to you guys. Give him the real dope, huh?"

"Give him that ol' death-in-the-clouds stuff," O'Toole said. He was a short, bluntly-built Irishman with an outward gruffness that sheltered the tender spot he had for Whitaker. The two Hermanns who had provided Whitaker with Victories Three and Four had been sitting rather determinedly on O'Toole's tail, trying to carve him into an Iron Cross and ten days' leave.

Whitaker said with mock annoyance, "What're you tryin' to do, Cork? Make a hero out of me?" He slapped him on the shoulder. "I don't wanna be a general—no future."

"You got a nice future here," O'Toole pointed out dryly. "Complete with harp an' halo."

"You're such a comfort," Whitaker said, and rumpled O'Toole's hair. "That's what you're back there for, Fat Boy. Scare all the bogie men away. Just wave your little derby at 'em. Shoo 'em away with it."

So they went away and as sometimes happens, the Hermanns weren't where they were supposed to be. The Hermanns left the bombers alone, and when the fighter escort had relinquished the shepherd's crook to another fighter escort and neared The Ditch on the way home, the Hermanns came down out of the sun and fought for a moment.

O'Toole turned into a Hermann to blast him away from Whitaker, who at that moment was trying to puncture another Hermann with a tough deflection shot. O'Toole's Hermann put a 20-millimeter shell into the Packard engine and the Irishman pushed his transmitter button and said, "Fat Boy is going for a swim. So long, girls," and hit the silk.

Whitaker circled him twice, the Hermanns having scurried home as quickly, but not in the same strength, as they had come. He saw O'Toole drop into The Ditch and, a moment later, clamber into the yellow, bobbing dinghy that had been a detachable part of his parachute pack. Whitaker grabbed some altitude so his radio transmission would carry, and gave O'Toole's position to Air-Sea Rescue.

The Cork, feeling the emptiness that always came with times like these, avoided Whitaker's stricken eyes. "Fat Boy'll be walkin' in any minute, Whit. He'll be O.K. Don't worry."

Whitaker's face was tense. "You hope, you hope. There's a lotta water out there. A helluva lot more than it looks like on that map. It's cold. Cold enough to freeze you to death. An' he's just a little guy in a little dinghy!"

The Cork got words around the lump in his throat. "You gave Air-Sea Rescue his position. They'll be picking him up."

"Yeah, sure. But I was so damned low on gas I couldn't stick around to watch his drift. An' it's gettin' dark an' windy, an' waves'll be pilin' into that dinghy an'—"

"Easy, Whit, easy! They'll get him," The Cork said, and tried to sound convincing.

Whitaker cursed, slammed his helmet into a corner and strode out of the Squadron Intelligence Office.

BACK in the Public Relations Office, The Cork awaited the return of Finkle, who had been dispatched in a jeep to meet the train. He was deep in thoughts about O'Toole when he heard the unmistakable rumble of Finkle's size-twelve brogans. They clumped down the hall at a speed highly unusual, even considering Finkle's early foot when racing time with a news story.

The door burst open. Finkle stood there dramatically, his face flushed with excitement. He spread his arms wide, and in a cascade of words proclaimed, "Lootenant, heezuhshee!"

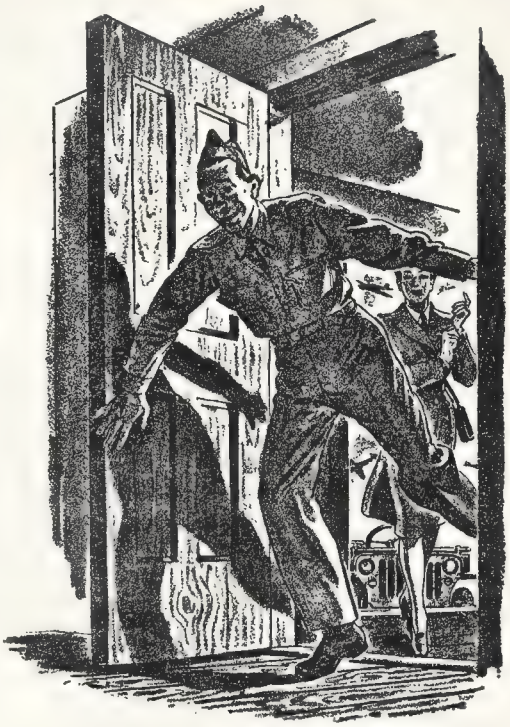
The Cork ballooned from his chair as though he suddenly had discovered he was sharing it with a delayed-action bomb. Into the office, with a situation-well-in-hand air, a dream was walking. It was a dream in O.D. clothing. Rather numbly, The Cork realized that this dream was just the right size, being slim in the approved places and not so slim, also in the approved places, and wearing a face that managed to look both capable and highly attractive.

"Lieutenant Corcoran?" the dream inquired crisply, and took his palsied hand. "I'm Andrews, Amalgamated Press." The dream dropped his hand as though that concluded the amenities before the bout. It made a dull sound on the desk top.

"I haven't a great deal of time to spare," Andrews went on, "and none to waste. I'm returning to London tomorrow night. First, I'd like to see Captain Whitaker. Where is he?"

The Cork sat down slowly to regroup his scattered senses, then popped up as chivalry needled him sharply. "Won't you sit down?"

She sat, casually displaying a bit of slim limb, and began to pull off her gloves. "Captain Whitaker is good copy. Twenty-two years old, an ace and a captain in the same day, father



The door burst open and Finkle, his face flushed with excitement, proclaimed, "Lootenant, heezuhshee!"

works in an aircraft plant, mother in a parachute factory. Can you take me to him?"

"The way you say it," The Cork observed politely, "he's a number, not a name. Sounds like Project Six-six-zero-one."

She permitted herself a brief smile. The effect was magical. It put goose-bumps on The Cork's goose-bumps. "Perhaps he is. He's just another uniform to me, Lieutenant. I've seen hundreds of them, you know. You're just another uniform, too—no offense."

"Is that bad?" The Cork inquired.

She shrugged. "I've looked at nothing except uniforms for six months. I've reached the point where I talk to the uniform instead of what's in it. It has a decided advantage," she admitted, "in not permitting, shall we say—"

"Extra-curricular?" he suggested.

"Well, yes. Extra-curricular activities to interfere with my work. This way, I find it quite easy to pass off the attentions of men who try to—well—"

"Take your mind off your work?" he offered, completely amenable to the idea.

"Mmmm-yes. A sort of inner wall arises within me now, the moment I see a uniform. It enables me to do my job without interference."

"You mean," The Cork decided, "that you're immune to wolves—"

"In Uncle Sam's clothing," she finished. "And then," she added complacently, "there's always my husband."

Abruptly The Cork felt the shock troops hurl him off the beach-head. He leaned forward, a glaze coming into his eyes. "You said—didn't you—husband?"

"That's what I said. Now, how about Whitaker?"

"The boys just returned from a mission and have gone to their quarters, but they'll all be in the officers' mess in about an hour. Meanwhile, I'll arrange for your billet."

"You haven't arranged for my billet?" Her tone whittled twenty degrees off the room's temperature.

"I did," he defended quickly, "only I don't think you'd be entirely comfortable in the pilots' barracks. You see, Miss Andrews, we thought—well, uh—we thought you were a he."

Her neat eyebrows arched, and she didn't have to tell him he had been stupid. He fumbled for the telephone and reached Margo, the Red Cross girl from Pennsylvania, and made arrangements for Andrews to share the billet. He smiled as he replaced the receiver. That hadn't been too hard. Now to recover the fumble. The vision of other correspondents hovered in his mind.

"I'm terrible sorry, Miss Andrews, that I've inconvenienced you so much," he began, licking some of the sugar from his lips. "I really hope your stay here will be enjoyable. We'll do everything—"

Andrews sighed. "Corcoran," she said, "throttle back. Save it."

He swallowed, and tried another tangent. "You'll like Whit," he told her eagerly. "He'll give you a good story. He's an easy-going, level-headed kid. A wonderful guy."

"No doubt," she agreed without enthusiasm, and arose.

"Finkle," The Cork called, "take Miss Andrews to her billet." He turned to her. "I'll pick you up in an hour."

She nodded. He said to Finkle, "O.K.?"

"Aye, aye, sir."

"Stop by here in about forty-five minutes."

"Aye, aye, sir."

The Cork looked at him with suspicion as Finkle moved toward the door. "What's all this 'aye, aye' business, Finkle?"

"Jus' practicin', Lootenant," he explained gloomily. "I hear Major Glennie's in the hospital, his throat so sore he can't talk. Heil, Navy, here we come."

AS THEY left, the matter of the group adjutant affixed The Cork with an accusing and unwavering eye. He felt the need for fresh air. He opened a window and gazed absently at two mechanics puttering around the needle-like nose of a trim Mustang. Shadows were lengthening. Overhead, a Flying Fortress, remembering the first raid on Schweinfurt, the early days without deep fighter escort, dipped its broad wings in a friendly gesture to the fighter field below. The Cork's troubled eyes followed the Fort for a moment, then slowly lighted with the impact of a growing idea.

Miraculously, he reached the nearby bomber base on the first call. Miraculously, McGonnigle, the bomb group's public relations officer, was in his office instead of the officers' bar.

"Mac, ol' boy," The Cork said with false gayety, "I'm in somewhat of a little jam. You got some Forts over there gonna put some slow time on their engines tomorrow, breakin' in?"

"Yeah."

"Mac, ol' boy, how's about sendin' the ice-cream freezer up with one of 'em? I'll send for the stuff. O.K., ol' pal, ol' pal?"

"Now, listen, Cork—"

"Just forget all about that two pounds you owe me," The Cork hastened on. "Always glad to help a pal, ya know."

"For a pal," Mac said, "anything."

The Cork felt the definite need for a stiffening of morale. In quest of same he phoned his quarters, a barracks shared by "A" and "B" Flights. He recognized Bud Portier's voice, and said, "Hi, Bud. We get any mail?"

The Cork heard a faraway explosion, closely resembling a pistol shot.

"Yep," Bud answered calmly. "But you'd better call back in about ten or fifteen minutes, Cork. I don't know yet how you made out. An' everybody but Whitaker an' me is out in the bomb shelter."

"The bomb shelter? There isn't any air raid on."

"I gotta go," Bud said urgently. "He's movin' up this way."

There was another explosion, louder.

"Who's movin' up what way?"

"Whitaker," Bud replied. "He's shootin' up the barracks. He got a letter his girl's gonna marry another guy."

There was another explosion, then silence.

The Cork leaned his chair to the wall and slowly and systematically began beating his head against the plaster.

Admiring eyes, and an eloquent whistle sharpened by eleven months of overseas duty, followed Andrews and The Cork into the large, twin Nissen huts which housed the officers' mess, bar and lounge. Andrews, unheeding, walked with calm assurance. The Cork walked with the air of a man approaching the father of all booby-traps. This was to be an hour of crisis. He steeled himself for what intuition told him would be a trying situation.

At its usual table in the far corner was "A" Flight—except for O'Toole. Seven pilots sat looking at their glasses seriously, as though the stubby Irishman might suddenly bob up

through the Scotch. Moving toward them, nodding absently at the familiar faces in the crowd, The Cork kept Andrews at his shoulder. His mind whirred down a single track marked Dead End.

Whitaker was seated at the head of the table, his eyes down. The Cork cleared his throat. "Hiya, Whit, boy."

He saw Whitaker's head weave slightly. There was no sign that he had heard.

With spurious confidence, The Cork said, "Whit, ol' boy, I want you to meet Cy—for Cynthia—Andrews, of Amalgamated Press."

Bud and the five other members of "A" Flight were watching with something akin to awe in their faces. Whether it was mute appreciation of Cy Andrews' chic appearance, or anticipation of the results they feared were imminent, The Cork didn't know. He suddenly began to care less. It wasn't going to work out. There was a chill wind blowing from North-North Andrews, even at this moment. And that brittle breeze was blowing The Cork right out of the good graces of Fighter Command. He found himself caring even less about that.

"Captain Whitaker," Andrews sounded frigid. "May I sit down?" She did not wait for a reply, but seated herself at his left, next to Bud Portier. All the pilots—except Whitaker—had arisen. Too late, The Cork realized that the empty chair had been for O'Toole.

Looking wholly uncomfortable, "A" Flight resumed their seats, and Bud said apologetically, "Captain Whitaker isn't feeling so hot, baby. It's been a rugged day."

Whitaker raised a face that showed he hadn't heard or seen any of it until now. He stared at Andrews, hard. He opened his mouth. He said to her, "Go away, please," and he didn't sound polite.

TO THE Cork's utter surprise, he saw Andrews smile. He detected a shade of feminine trickery in it, but even so it was quite a smile. Beautiful women are twice as beautiful when they smile, and beautiful women are no every-day commodity overseas. "A" Flight succumbed to a man—who was Whitaker, and who did not succumb. The warm radiance was beamed directly at him. He didn't melt, the way The Cork did, but it gave a slight boost to his manifold pressure. He said thickly, "I'm not in the mood to talk to women. Sorry. Go away again."

She held the smile, but The Cork could feel the claws stealing out of the velvet gloves as she purred, "You're not one of those temperamental pilots I've heard about, are you, Captain?"

Whitaker growled, "I don't know what you've heard. An' I've got news for you: I also don't care. I'm just not in the mood. See me in some other war."

Her face turned sympathetic. She had something on the ball, all right, The Cork realized. And feminine charm might repair the damage a feminine letter had brought. "I know you've had a rather bad day, Captain," she said soothingly. "Lieutenant Corcoran told me about Lieutenant O'Toole."

Whitaker drained his glass and set it down hard. His tone was bitter. "Did he also tell you how my aim is so bad that there's a Hermann too many left over there? Did he also tell you about a letter I got this afternoon? Maybe you'd better interview Lieutenant Corcoran." He tried to drink out of the empty glass.

"A letter?" Andrews said quickly. "Oh, it must have been bad news to make you— I'm sorry, Captain. But perhaps if we just sat and talked about your flying," she suggested, and paused. "I'm really not awfully dumb about it. I've talked to a great many pilots. And then, too, my husband is a flyer."

At the word "husband," The Cork noted, Bud's gradually protruding fangs popped back into their recesses and the wolfish look faded from his eyes.

With an attempt at a disinterested air, Whitaker observed, "Husband flyer, eh? Over here?"

"No—back in the States," she explained. "He's an instructor."

In an instant, Whitaker's face darkened to a fearsome scowl. He arose abruptly and glared down at her. Bud reached for his arm, but Whitaker jerked aside, kicked over his chair and shouldered his way out.

Breaking the taut silence, Andrews exclaimed, "Why, that—that prima donna! That big-headed, conceited—"

"Easy, baby, easy," Bud intoned heavily. "That guy's one of the best fighter pilots in the business. He's tops. He's the kind they originated medals for. An' he's had a rugged day."

"Well, my goodness," returned Andrews, reaching for composure, "is he like this every time he's had a rough day?"

"Not after the rough ones," Bud said. "Only the rugged ones. There's a difference."

"I don't get it."

"It ain't every day that a guy gets a letter his girl is gonna marry another guy." Bud paused, then added significantly, "Particularly that she's gonna marry a flyin' instructor."

Wistfully, The Cork said, "Anybody got a handbook on hara-kiri?"

With spirits so low they were like pebbles in his shoes, he assisted Andrews out of the jeep. Desperation dogged his slow footsteps as they moved toward the door of the Nissen hut. If Andrews wrote her Whitaker story in her current frame of mind, no good could result. It would be unfair to Whit. It also would be unfair, The Cork realized dimly, to the people at home who too often remember the one unfavorable incident in a man's life—the incident that

The Cork could feel the claws stealing out of the velvet gloves as she purred,

goes deep and should lie buried—and forget the many favorable ones. The phrase echoing from The Case of Major Glennie caused him a slight mental tremor.

"He's quite a character," Andrews was observing coolly. "Some fighter pilots are the temperamental type, I suppose. But I hadn't really believed it until now."

"Aw, look, Miss Andrews. He isn't really that way. Give the guy a break, huh? Let it rest for a day. What with his girl marryin' another guy, an' losin' O'Toole—"

"Was he really in love?" she inquired casually.

"O'Toole? I dunno. . . . Oh, you mean—well, yeah, I guess so. At least, he thought he was. That's the only way you know, isn't it?"

"Was she pretty?" Andrews wondered.

"Why, yeah. Very." He waved a hand. "Attractive-like. You know. Now, how about holdin' off on your story—"

"Had he known her long?" Andrews sidestepped a mud puddle.

"What? Oh. Yeah. Look, Miss Andrews, give it another day, willya? I'll find lots of stuff for you to work on tomorrow. Real good stuff. The kind of stories that make people remember your by-line."

Andrews said thoughtfully, "Like what?"

"Well—like how they live. Uh——the way they feel about things like shootin' guys down, an' the peculiar ways they relax. Maybe—"

"Captain Fanning mentioned that you had given him a couple of good ideas for features," she recalled. "One of them sounded as if it might be all right." She turned the knob of the door. "I'll dig into it tomorrow."

"Which idea was that?"

"Oh, about the superstitions that some of them have. Good luck charms. It might be interesting." She stepped inside. "Good night, Lieutenant."

THE colonel, a slim man with lively eyes, and wearing a row of Pacific Theater ribbons, smiled with conscious admiration of Andrews' appearance. "If Lieutenant Corcoran doesn't see that you get everything you need, baby—er, Miss Andrews, let me know." He leaned forward confidingly. "You know, he's had a little trouble getting me used to war correspondents. But suddenly I'm beginning to like it."

She uncrossed her well-shaped legs and arose from her chair. "Thank you so much, Colonel." She paused. "Oh, there is one more thing. I wanted to travel around the base this morning and speak to some of the men. Could you arrange for transportation?"

"I'll get a jeep, sir," The Cork offered.

"A jeep?" The colonel appeared mildly disdainful. "Nonsense. It's much too cold and windy." He gave Andrews a warm smile. "Take my staff car."

"Why, I wouldn't think of doing that—al-

"You're not one of those temperamental pilots I've heard about, are you, Captain?"

though it's very kind of you, and it really would be nice—"

"Then that settles it. Just tell the driver where you wish to go. Some of my flying equipment is in the back seat, but so long as you're back before takeoff time—that's about eleven o'clock—it'll be all right."

"That's simply wonderful of you," she purred.

The colonel cleared his throat. He was twenty-nine, and unmarried.

The Cork spoke quickly, "If you wish to write your husband while you're here, Miss Andrews, we have a daily mail service."

The colonel's left eyebrow twitched. "Before eleven, Miss Andrews," he reminded her, without the warm smile.

Two hours later, The Cork looked across his desk at her wind-reddened face and inquired with a slight tinge of anxiety, "Everything go O.K.?"

"Fine," she answered crisply. "Just one thing. There isn't anything really outstanding to use as my lead. Some of the angles aren't bad at all—but nothing actually stands out above the rest."

He breathed easier. She hadn't stumbled across the colonel's powderpuff. Having been thwarted once, Andrews would have called down the wrath of the gods upon him at a recurrence. Mentally, he gave the sleeping dogs a tender pat. "There's Kornetski's doll," he suggested hopefully.

"Not bad," she said, "but not good."

"O'Toole's derby would have been perfect. Only . . ." He let the words trail off. He didn't like to think about O'Toole.

"Not much good luck in that," Andrews pointed out barrenly.

The telephone rang, and the colonel said smoothly, "Corcoran, have you by any chance seen something of mine?"

"Seen something, sir?"

"Yes, seen something. Don't be a parrot."

"No, sir. Well, that is, sir, many times I've seen things—"

"Hooray for you," the colonel said without enthusiasm. "Corcoran, this is something special. It was in my car, I'm sure. It isn't there now. That dame," he went on coldly, "doesn't have it, does she?"

"That da—"

"Corcoran! Stop playing echo!"

"How big is it, sir?" he asked weakly.

The colonel cleared his throat. "Well, sort of small. That is, small, as they go. If you've ever seen big ones, it's a small one. Sort of."

The Cork's brain was whirling. He wrinkled his brow and tried to concentrate. "Yes, sir."

The colonel snapped, "You don't know what-the hell I'm talking about you, do you? If you do," he growled threateningly, "and are just—"

"Oh, no, sir. Honest."

"Well," the colonel said grudgingly, "if I told you what it was, you'd know."

"Sir," The Cork said in polite desperation, "I think you have something there."

"If you don't know what it is," the colonel returned, "I don't want you to know. And if you do know, I'd be embarrassed. It's a helluva mess." His voice was suddenly exasperated. "Do something!"

The Cork looked at Andrews, busily repairing the damage wrought by English wind and low temperature. His gaze wandered out the window, then returned to Andrews with the speed of a bolt of lightning with its throttle to the firewall. She was calmly powdering her nose.

The Cork gaped, gasped and groaned. The colonel was muttering things in his ear.

"Sir," The Cork's voice shook, "I've sighted the target and am preparing for action."

"Get it up here right away!" the colonel barked. "And don't let anyone see it. It's a very personal matter, Corcoran. Very personal," he repeated distinctly, and the clang of dungeon doors crept into the words.

THE Cork somehow found an expression which he hoped was beguiling. In return, Andrews handed him one of mingled surprise and suspicion.

"That powderpuff," The Cork said sleekly. "May I ask where you got it?"

She regarded it with casual interest. "Why, yes. On the floor of the colonel's car." She winked. "He certainly gets around, doesn't he?"

It must have become detached from the colonel's Mae West. Only once before had The Cork seen the puff. The colonel came back with his first victory, and as The Cork climbed onto the wing with the photographer he had seen the colonel tuck the strange charm back into the life jacket, out of sight.

"If you'll let me have it," he said, struggling for an ease of manner, "I'll return it to him."

"Oh, she'll probably never miss it," Andrews said lightly. "I seem to have lost my own somewhere. This isn't such a hot substitute—but it'll do until I get back to London. I'll mail it to him."

The Cork winced. Time, standing somewhere behind him with agitated expression, winced in sympathy, then began tapping an impatient sandal. "I'd really like to have it, now. It's—well, it's kind of important."

Andrews laughed. "Important? Don't be sil—" The laughter stopped. A quizzical look, a prospective gleam, came into her eyes. The Cork rubbed a hand across his face. "O.K., Corcoran," she said softly. "What's the story?"

"You can't print it," he said doggedly. He planted his elbows on the desk and propped his chin in his hands. "Miss Andrews, it's something in a man's life that is much better left unsaid. Something that goes deep, and should lie buried there."

"Oh, my aching back," said Andrews. "You're talking in riddles. What is this thing that lies deep?"

"You'll have to hear it off the record," he maintained. "I'll have to get your promise that you won't use it."

She frowned. "I can't promise that unless you can show me where it would do more harm than good."

"Oh, it would," The Cork replied mournfully, as the dungeon doors opened with a distant, metallic invitation. "Indeed it would."

"For the love of Mike," Andrews grated, "will you please—"

"It's a love story," he said hurriedly. "An' it's very sad."

She pursed her lips. "Whitaker again?"

"The colonel," The Cork intoned dolefully. "He was in love with her—"

"Over here?"

"Uh—oh, no. In the islands. In the Philippine Islands."

Her eyes widened incredulously. "A native girl?"

"No! Oh, gosh no. She was—she was a nurse." His voice took on a deep shade of sorrow. "Bataan was falling, Andrews. Japs were getting closer an' closer. She was to be taken away on a boat. He stayed to fight."

Andrews leaned forward. Over her face stole a beatific glow, and she breathed, "How lovely!"

"It was their last hour together," he said huskily. He knew how a man could feel in that last hour—the sweet, hurting emptiness that began even before the last kiss, the tingle that comes with facing a challenge.

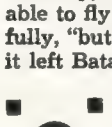
Andrews' eyes were misty. She touched the powderpuff lying on the desk. Softly, she said, "And she gave him this."

The Cork picked it up reverently. He couldn't speak. Andrews fumbled for a handkerchief. "That's a beautiful story, Cork. Why can't I use it?"

He shook his head slowly. "The colonel is engaged to another girl," he explained, "back in the States. "It isn't quite like it was with the nurse—but it's good. She doesn't know of this chapter in his past, and since a man can only feel a love like that just once, and it turned out that way—well, it's better this way, Cynthia."

She dabbed her eyes with the lace. "Since it turned out what way, Cork?"

He tucked the powderpuff inside his jacket tenderly, and arose. "The colonel finally was able to fly away," he told her, and added painfully, "but her boat was never heard from after it left Bataan."



O'TOOLE removed the brine-caked, soggy derby and regarded it with great affection. "Good ol' iron hat," he said. "Wonderful little iron hat."

The Cork was having difficulty in assembling the story. Andrews was seated at the typewriter, a batch of notes beside her.

"Like I said," O'Toole repeated patiently. "That little bucket came loose from my dinghy, an' the waves were fillin' it up. This little ol' iron hat," he held it up pridefully, "that I hung onto all the way down came in mighty handy. I used it to bail out the water. Wait till that Whitaker comes down. I guess he'll stop kidding me about my little iron hat, now."

In response to his laconic radio call, the ambulance met Whitaker's plane at the end of the runway. They took him to the base hospital and Major Williams removed the six flak splinters from his feet and legs.

"So he strafed a German airdrome," The Cork was explaining to Andrews for the fifth time. "They shoot back, you know. So he did blow up three ME-100s an' a gasoline truck. Plus that locomotive on the way back. But the guy is hurt a little, an' maybe they won't let you see him."

Major Williams emerged from the room. Andrews put a hand on his arm and said, "Is he—"

"He's fine," the major smiled. "Takes more than that to keep that boy down."

"Then may I see him? There's a story—"

"Sure. Do him good." The major raised an eyebrow at The Cork. "What have you there, Corcoran?" He pointed at a small, dampish-looking tin.

"It's something for the group adjutant."

"Oh—peace offering, eh?" He smiled again. "I hope it works. He's in the big ward next to the dentist's office."

"Thanks, Major. But first I want to see Whit."

Whitaker, propped up in bed with his legs resting in a complicated sling, greeted them with a wan breeziness. "Hiya, Andrews. Hiya, Cork."

Andrews, who had been moving toward him with a walk The Cork would have described as intriguing, suddenly stopped. The Cork saw a strange look come into her eyes. It was a gentleness, and the sudden knowledge of a sweet discovery. The pilot's expression changed, and a wondering look stole over his face.

"Wow," he murmured solemnly, gazing at her. "Maybe it's because there aren't any buttons on these pajamas—but I'm hot an' cold, all at once."

She moved forward again, slowly, and took his hand. "You're different," she said, and there was something akin to awe in her tone. "I—I don't know, exactly, what it is."

The Cork knew. It was the pajamas. Whitaker no longer was just a uniform.

The Cork said, "I hate to do this. I really hate to do this. But, Cy, your husband—"

She kept her eyes on Whitaker's face as she sat down slowly on the edge of the bed. "Go somewhere, Cork," she said softly. "That was just something else to hold off the wolves."

Whitaker wrinkled his nose and howled faintly.

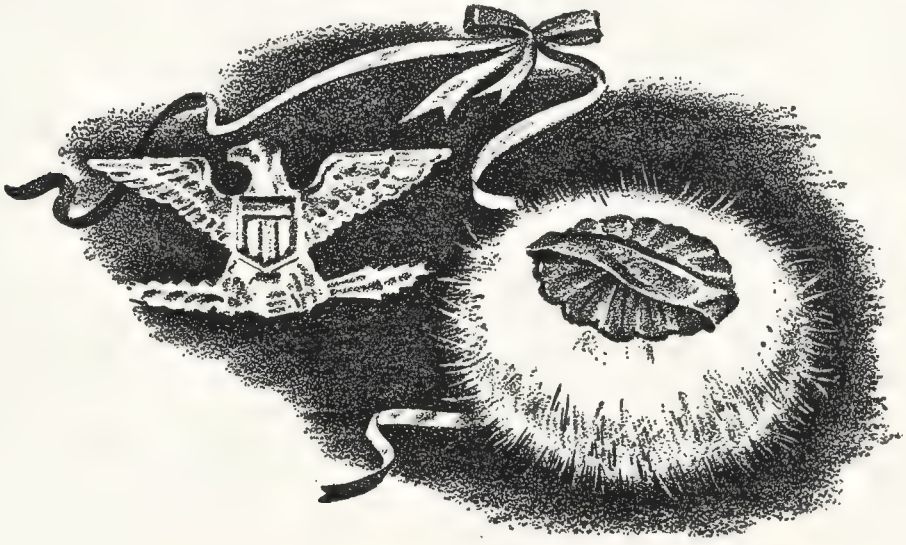
The group adjutant, his belligerency fast fading, took another large spoonful of the ice cream.

"So I talked her out of it," The Cork was reporting, "an' got it back to the colonel before takeoff time an' she isn't going to use it in her story. She's going to use about O'Toole."

The group adjutant nodded with approval, and muttered hoarsely, "Good. Good boy. If the colonel ever lost that powderpuff, Diane would never forgive him."

"Diane?" echoed The Cork. His eyes saucered. "Is she—oh, golly! Was she—a nurse, maybe? On Bataan?"

The group adjutant stared at him. "On Bataan?" he croaked. "Hell, no! She's a bubble-dancer at the Jam Club in London."



The Bloody Road

By GORDON MacCREAGH

FROM Myitkyina, where the Yanks are improving the new Burma Road, and from Imphal, from which the British are basing their present advance, open the two possible routes into Burma—the great valleys of the Irrawaddy and the Chindwin Rivers—and they both meet at Mandalay, the heart of Burma, that was conceived in blood and must be won back with blood before India can be called safe.

For there is a grisly prophesy about Mandalay—that each new ruler will wade to it knee-deep in blood.

Only a little over fifty years ago, Mandalay was the capital of free and independent Upper Burma ruled by its bloodthirsty king, Thi-Baw, who, upon his accession, turned an elephant loose to trample his seventy brothers to death in order to appease his wife, Supi-Ya-Lat, whose marriage they had opposed. And then Thi-Baw built a great monastery of carved teak and gold leaf to house seventy priests to appease the angry spirits of the brothers.

This Thi-Baw inherited his ideas about life from his father, King Mindoon Min, who founded Mandalay and had appeased the evil spirits of the jungle by burying alive a prisoner of war under each cornerstone of his new fortified palace.

Old men still live who tell the grim tale and relate with a certain sardonic skepticism the story of the Christian missionary's rifle that could not be appeased and was the eventual death of Mindoon.

Mindoon the king was a man who believed whole-heartedly in the prevalence of spirits and his life was spent appeasing them for all the ferocious things he did. It was, in fact, the haunt of his uncle, King Pagan Min, that drove him to abandon the old capital, lock, stock and barrel, and go away to start a new one at Mandalay.

Uncle Pagan Min had died rather mysteriously of an inability to breathe. It was said that a fine silk cord had something to do with the difficulty. That, and the fact that nephew Min-

The stretch of roadway along which the peasantry went shopping was just about the right shooting distance for a really good rifle in the hands of a sporting monarch . . .

to Mandalay

doon had ambitions to take over the seven hundred and fifty hand-picked prettiest girls in Burma that Uncle had collected and was too old to do justice to. Little wonder that Mindoon was haunted and that his son Thi-Baw had seventy quite individualistic brothers.

And how do I know this fantastic tale of blood to be true out of a land that has kept no history? Because I know some of the old men who saw it happen. Incidentally, and apropos of truth, one of the old men was Thi-Baw's personal tattoo artist who was authorized, by royal command, to tattoo the kingly emblem of the peacock upon certain selected subjects' hides as a mark of the royal favor, which was then so powerful that it was a guaranteed charm against being bitten by dragons in the jungle as well as by snakes.

After Thi-Baw's ousting by the British Raj, the old gentleman still plied his trade; for a bottle of whiskey he tattooed a splendid peacock on my arm. And the charm worked. Since I've had it, I have never been bitten by either dragon or snake.

It was a powerful spirit that came riding on one of these dragons to visit King Mindoon's personal soothsayer to tell him that this site on the Irrawaddy River was THE spot for the new city of Mandalay.

Unbelievers say that this spirit was really a French engineer who came riding on a mule with a saddlebag full of rupees. This crafty gentleman, playing the merry game of imperialistic diplomacy, thought it would be nice for the French colony of Indo-China to reach and spread into Upper Burma with its teak trees and ruby mines, to offset the British who already held Rangoon and the lower half of Burma.

Apparently he was a good engineer as well as a shrewd diplomat, for he got himself the job of building Mindoon's fortifications; and a

ILLUSTRATED BY
EDD ASHE

...So when the afternoons hung heavy on his hands, King Mindoon found his sport taking pot shots at his subjects as they trudged to market.

fine, artistic job he made of them, too. Twenty-foot walls, a mile square, battlements and a tower at each corner, with living prisoners buried under each one, and with a deep, medieval moat and drawbridges. A thing to delight the heart of any savage king. Impregnable. The Frenchman took his honest money for a good job well done and departed for home in Indo-China with a pack train of mules laden with *daung paisha*, the Burmese silver money with the peacock emblem.

It just so happened that the site for all this splendor, by the most curious chance, had been chosen at the foot of the only hill in all the surrounding plain, from which hill a couple of field mortars smuggled in some dark night could knock the fort into chunks of rubble.

But King Mindoon, who was no military engineer, didn't know about this—till another white man, an Englishman this time, who by sheer happenstance was hunting rhinoceros in Burma and who happened to be a military engineer in his spare time, spilled the whole sack of treacherous French beans before Mindoon.

Mindoon, a good deal like Alice-in-Wonderland's duchess, commanded "off with his head" for everybody connected with the deal—the soothsayer who had seen the dragon and the ministers of public works who had overseen the building and all the contractors—everybody who might have had a finger in any of the quiet graft. Then the king sent forth his runners, Shan mountaineers who could travel those terrific mountain trails much faster than could a mule train laden with a French engineer and a lot of money in silver coin. The runners caught up with the engineer just before he reached the safety of his Indo-China border and they brought back all the money and the engineer, too. Outraged King Mindoon sat for two days in a plush chair over the great moat, watching the fish nibble at the engineer's head.

ALL of which leads up to the missionary and his rifle. For by this time it can be understood that the king was pretty well "off of" all white men, suspecting that in some crafty manner every one of them had clever ideas about his kingdom.

Thi-Baw's personal tattoo artist was authorized by royal command to tattoo the kingly emblem upon certain selected subjects' hides as a mark of royal favor.

So when the innocent Man of God came and asked permission to preach the Word to the heathen, Mindoon thought, "Aha, another one of them in a new disguise." He told the missionary that his people were Buddhists and not interested in mythology and for him to hurry up and get out.

But a Syrian trader who knew more about the intricacies of life than did the good missionary, advised him that a suitable gift would most likely soften the monarch's heart; also that a most suitable gift for Mindoon who, it was rumored, had been yearning for a little sport after the labor of building a new city, would be a rifle. A sporting rifle, of course; by no means a military weapon with which to take human lives—and it just so happened that the trader had such a rifle to sell.

So the innocent missionary bought the rifle and paid the proper *cumshaw* to the proper minister of the ante chamber to present it to the king with a renewal of his request for permission to spread the good Word amongst his majesty's subjects. Since the rifle was really a good one, one of the then modern high-power "expresses," the monarch's heart was softened and he gave permission to the missionary to preach whatsoever he liked wheresoever he liked, and if he gained any converts, to let him know—Ha-ha! The merriment was occasioned because skeptics said—and still say—that no Burmese Buddhist has ever been honestly converted to Christianity.

Of the missionary's success no more is known. He passes out of the picture. But not so his rifle. By no means that good long-range rifle. For the rumor that the wily Syrian trader had passed on was true. King Mindoon had indeed been having some nostalgic thoughts about sport. In fact, in his youth he had been quite a hunter. But in these later years he had been getting a bit gouty, and trampling the jungles after elephants and tigers was not as easy for him as it had been.

However, King Mindoon was monarch of all he surveyed in his kingdom and had all the prerogatives of a monarch. So, since he could not go to his sport, sport must needs come to him.

Amongst the monuments to his glory he had erected a great circular watch tower from which he could survey considerable portions of his city. This tower, incidentally, was built with a winding outside staircase that decreased in diameter as it climbed; the idea being that at no time should any mere subject be able to stand between the King's Majesty and heaven. From its top could be seen, among other things, a stretch of roadway along which the peasantry went to market—about half a mile distant and about a hundred yards of clear road between clumps of jungle. A very nice shooting distance for a really good rifle in the hands of a sporting monarch.

Of course, no wild game ever passed along a stretch of road so close to the city of Mandalay. But tame peasantry did. And mere peasantry were regarded by the nobility as not so far removed from animals.

So when the afternoons hung heavy on his hands, our gouty absolute monarch found his sport taking pot shots at his far subjects as they trudged to market.

It really was a very good and accurate rifle.

But the peasantry, having at least as much sense as animals, took to making a long detour around that dangerous hundred yards of open road. Whereat the monarch waxed quite indignant, and sent out his army to round up the recalcitrant peasants who had no sense of obligation to the divine right of their king and drive them along the proper road that he had so generously built for their convenience.

But Mindoon really did have his sporting instincts. He was fair about it. The peasantry, herded to the road, could take a long breath at the edge of the jungle shelter, get all set, and then run like all hell. One hundred yards! A little over ten seconds for a good frightened man! It called for nice fast shooting. And if the peasant made it, good! He got a certificate at the other end and he didn't have to make the run again. Fair enough, no? The spirits of those of his subjects whom the king got at that long range were appeased, Mindoon buying as many prayers for each man as seven monks could say in seven days.

But something went wrong about that appeasement—possibly because the rifle had come as a simple gift from an innocent Man of God. The ghosts of the victims gathered at night to gibber over the king's bed. The soothsayers and the priests came and offered the remedies of their kind, more incantations by the wizards and more prayers by the priests. Some of them even suggested that the king might try to lead a better life.

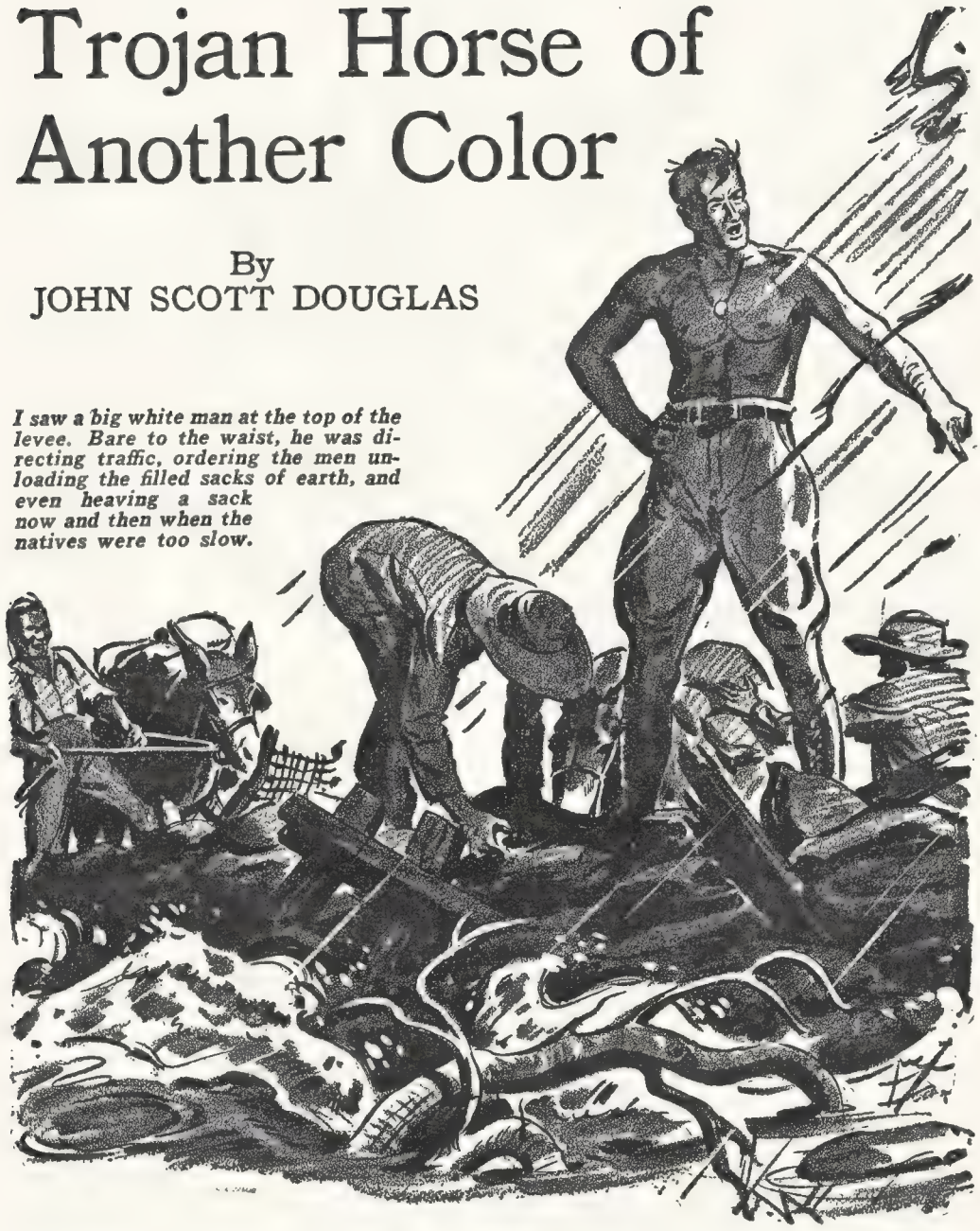
Which, in his extremity of fear, he did. He gave up his only sport. But the victims were still quite dead and their ghosts still remained angry ghosts. They gibbered their nightly vigil over the royal bed and they had, as have all Burmese ghosts, eyes that protruded on stalks, like crabs. You can see them in temple mural paintings about hell.

Finally King Mindoon, too, gibbered in terror and went quite mad and died, shrieking to his physicians to keep the ghosts away from him.

Then came Thi-baw who waded to possession of Mandalay in the blood of his brothers. And presently came the British from Rangoon to wade through a bloody war, according to Mandalay's prophesy. Then came the Japs, wading through the blood of those that have not yet been counted. And presently again will come the Yanks and the British together. This time it will be Japanese blood. It must be so. It is Mandalay's prophesy.

Trojan Horse of Another Color

By
JOHN SCOTT DOUGLAS



I saw a big white man at the top of the levee. Bare to the waist, he was directing traffic, ordering the men unloading the filled sacks of earth, and even heaving a sack now and then when the natives were too slow.

VITALITY and purpose showed in the way the big stranger swung from his mule. Guatemalan muleteers lifting emerald stems from the tramcar to the platform stared as he strode briskly toward the pickup car, and the Jamaican Negroes passing banana trash through the open door also stopped work. Something indefinably belligerent about the big fellow's massive shoulders and heavy jaw gave me a guilty feeling of relief that I was wearing glasses. When he pushed back his broad-brimmed Stetson at the box-car door, I knew he wasn't new to the country. The sun had etched fine lines at the corners of his frosty blue eyes and below his pale forehead his face was blistered.

"Paul Brenton around?" he asked, almost truculently.

ILLUSTRATED BY JOHN MEOLA

I told him that the overseer was riding the *finca* but might drop by. Explaining that I was the Haida Farm timekeeper, Dex Van Deven, I asked if I could help him. Maybe he thought me too young to bother with, for he swung away without replying. Squinting against the incandescent sunlight, his eyes critically swept

the grove. They passed across the mule-drawn tramcar vanishing into a shadowy cavern formed by the great flimsy banana leaves, and took in the numerous sterile water suckers, the clogged drainage ditch beginning to overflow, and a pool of stagnant water.

"What count you shipping today?" he inquired bluntly.

"Six hundred," I said. "But nearly two-thirds are six- and seven-hands, so it will run to nearly fourteen hundred stems."

"Haida used to ship mostly full counts, nines and better."

"When the plants were younger," I amended.

"And better cared for," he added testily.

Obviously he knew the banana game too well to miss the signs of neglect. Once Paul Brenton was as good an overseer as you'd find on Guatemala's east coast. But three attacks of malaria and no vacation since Pearl Harbor had slowed his drive. Even after my warnings that the fruit company might crack down, he'd let things coast, some days not even riding the farm.

"You're not a fruit company official?" I asked, trying to learn more about him. "Thought I knew all the men in the district."

"I've been on the west coast. Craig's my name—Kendall Craig." The ghost of a smile played across his wide mouth. *"Brenton will remember."*

The way he said it made me uneasy. I suggested that he ride to the bungalow and have Maria make him some coffee while he waited, hoping that I'd have a chance to warn Brent. After all, Brent was more of a friend than a superior; he'd been very patient while instructing me in my timekeeper's duties.

Dismissing my suggestion with a shrug, Craig sat down on the loading platform and rolled a smoke. I was teaching a new checker how to make a fruit count, and I had to see that "trash" protected the fruit being loaded, so I tried to forget Craig. Whenever I glanced up from the tally sheet, he was staring with a tense and unseeing belligerency at the *cordillera*. I sensed that he was thinking of Brent rather than of the snow-tipped and distance-purpled mountains, so by the time the men walked down the track to eat their lunches under a giant ceiba tree, I was on edge.

"Come on," I said. "We'll go up to the house. Probably find Brenton there. . . He couldn't get in any of the armed services because of old football injuries, and I have eye trouble not entirely correctable with glasses. How's it happen you're not serving?"

"Slow heart," Craig said bitterly. "Of all the damned nonsense!"

Brush crackled as I started toward my tethered mule. Suddenly Brent rode onto the tram track from one of the fruit paths. Lean and tall, his deeply-tanned skin gave him a deceptive appearance of hard fitness that contrasted with a certain listlessness in his eyes. He was burned out, physically and in spirit; four years in the fever-ridden low country is too long for a white man.

CRAIG had risen. When Brent recognized him, his face became masklike, and he made a half-motion to draw rein. But he rode up to the loading platform before dismounting, and extended his hand.

"I hoped you'd turn up some day, Craig."

Craig ignored the extended hand. "Like hell you did, Brenton!" His low voice was carefully controlled, as if something raging in him were trying to break loose.

Their faces were so stiff that I had the incongruous notion they would crack in the shriveling sunlight. Brent's arm dropped as stiffly as a semaphore. In the ensuing silence the choral buzzing of flies and the swish of the mules' tails seemed very loud. Far off in the grove I heard cutters still at work—the sharp *thwack* of their machetes and the splintering of severed stalks bending under the weight of stems of bananas. And still the men stood staring at each other, growing sharper before my eyes like a movie being brought into focus.

"You never heard my side of it, Craig!"

"*Your* side! Hell's bells! You were my timekeeper and reported me drunk because you wanted to be overseer of Cherokee Farm!"

"When your mule came back by itself and I rode out and found you lying across the tracks, I thought you were dead drunk. Not until two months after your discharge did I learn that you'd gone to Guatemala City hospital with typhoid."

"Did you bother to smell my breath?"

"N-n-no." Brent wilted slightly. "But you'd been hitting the bottle so steadily that I assumed—"

"You assumed that because it would give you my job! You were made overseer of Cherokee right after that!"

"Brent wouldn't deliberately do a thing like that," I said, painfully conscious of a cracked tremolo note. Even to me it sounded like a kid talking, but I'd put Brent on a pedestal and now it was crumbling. Neither man looked at me.

"Your version doesn't hold water, Craig. I'd have been in line for an overseer's job on another farm in a month or so."

"If one were available! Reporting me to the superintendent took care of that!"

"I tell you I didn't know you had typhoid! When I learned about it, I got leave of absence to go up to the city to square things with you, but you'd left the hospital and gone up into the mountains. I tried to find you in Antigua, Quezaltenango—" Brent's jaw muscles suddenly whitened. "What can I do now, Craig?"

A light flickered through Craig's cool blue eyes. "I've been to the super. He'll let me be your first assistant if you'll take me on."

Brent hesitated.

"You'll take me on, Brenton, or I'll go to the super with the whole story. Van Deven is witness that you admitted framing me."

"I admitted no such thing! But I'll give you a chance."

Craig gestured toward the grove. "I rode part of the farm before coming here, Brenton. Neglect everywhere! I'm going to whip it into shape; be such a damned good assistant that you'll be able to spend your days on the porch drinking planters' punches until you're rum-dumb. You'll have no excuse to fire me. Then one day something big will demand a good man —not a flabby overseer who can't take it any longer. Where'll I be then? Right on the porch with a tall glass in my hand, enjoying your struggle with something you're too soft to lick. That, Brenton, will be the payoff!"

Dusky color had risen under Brent's deep tan. "I'll take you on, Craig," he said in a strained voice. "But not because of your ridiculous threats. If you've got any idea that you're forcing my hand, go to the super with your story. I've already told him everything."

"From your side," Craig said bluntly. "No, Brenton, I'll do it my way. I'll be dreaming of the day when I can kick the props from under you!"

We mounted and rode in silence along the railway track until José Salazar ran out of our white-trimmed yellow bungalow to take the mules.

"Feed them, but leave them saddled," Brent said. "We'll be riding again after lunch. This is my new assistant, Señor Kendall Craig."

The moon-faced little houseboy elevated his brows because Brent had been in the habit of taking an hour's siesta after lunch.

Brent scarcely spoke again until we'd finished the meal Maria had prepared. Then he turned to me.

"Your checker should know how to count fruit now, Van. Show Craig around Haida; maybe he doesn't know it as well as he thinks he does."

Riding northeast along the tracks, we passed the workers' shacks elevated on poles on the right side, and crossed a couple of planks bridging the drainage ditch. Our mules made so little sound on the spongy fruit path that we surprised a foreman and his Jamaican crew lying flat on the ground, with hats over their faces. The whites of Charlie Davis' eyes shone as he arose guiltily. Slack overseers result in slack men, so their siesta astonished me less than Craig's reaction.

With an angry, "*Qué cosa, mozos!* What the hell do you think you are, overseers?" he spurred his mule across the loamy black earth as if about to run down the supine men. All except Davis sought protection behind banana plants, but the foreman tremblingly held his ground. I urged my mule forward, wondering what the wild, cursing fellow was about to do.

"Davis, you shiftless son of Satan, I'll flay you alive, I'll feed you to the alligators, I'll stake you to a fire-ants' nest and pour honey over you, I'll cut out that evil heart of yours—"

RELIEF came into the foreman's face, and he ran toward the plunging, stumbling mule. "Mr. Craig! Mr. Craig! You come back!"

"Damned right I'm back, you foul-hearted monster. And about time!" Craig cried sternly. "Is this the way you prune a grove? Water suckers everywhere needing cutting out! Why, you black heathen—"

Davis grinned broadly. "We maghty tahed, suh."

"Tired?" Craig swore fiercely. "I ought to fire the lot of you and get your boy William to do the job. . . How's William, by the way?"

"Maghty fine boy, suh. Remember, 'fo' you left Cherokee, you toted him five-six miles on yo' mule 'cause he got infected foot? Dat foot got all heal' up; she don't give no trouble."

"That boy's worth ten worthless reprobates like you, Davis!"

The foreman's eyes lighted. "Yes, suh! . . . And Jubilee, she often talk 'bout you, Mr. Craig."

Craig feigned surprise. "You mean that handsome mulatto girl you married hasn't found another man yet?"

"She don't want no other man. We got 'nother boy, now."

Craig glared suspiciously. "If you named him Kendall Craig—"

"Dat 'zactly what we name him!" Davis seemed delighted that Craig had guessed.

"You scoundrel! What will people think with a dozen boys in the district named after me? You tell Jubilee I'll be calling on her some night when you're away drinking 'white-eye'."

I tried to catch Craig's eye. One thing a white man with any sense doesn't do is play around with the wives of his workers.

But Davis beamed broadly. "Ah don't drink no mo'. Ah got religion now. Ah'm home every night—every night, suh."

"You damned well better be! Tell Jubilee I haven't forgotten those hot biscuits she used to send me by William."

"She sho' good cook. Maybe she send you some mo'."

"Maybe she'd better, if she doesn't want me to fire that fiend she married. . . By the way, the blade of this knife broke." He flipped it to the foreman. "William might like it, anyway."

Davis' eyes rounded as he examined the shin-

ing blade. "This knife ain't broke. This knife brand new. You don't want to give it to William!"

"Are you telling me what I can give William?" Craig thundered with every indication of belligerency. "You'll go too far some day, Davis!"

"Yes, suh!" said Davis happily. "And Ah sho' thank you. Jubilee, she won't fo'get them biscuits, Mr. Craig."

I felt relieved when Craig wheeled his mule back toward the path. He'd given every appearance of anger. Had it not been for the way Charlie Davis took it, I would have believed he meant it. As we rode on, the foreman's voice drifted through the grove.

"Get to work, you no-'count trash. You think you get paid fo' sleepin' all day? I feed yo' to alligators, tie yo' to fire-antses' nest—"

I heard the steady *thwack* of machetes and the crash of falling water suckers, the banana plants which bear no fruit.

We came upon other work gangs, some cutting fruit and loading five stems on special canvas packs before drivers led the burros over to the tramcar tracks. Other crews were pruning, and a small crew was at work on the levee. Since all these men were doing their jobs, Craig said little other than to ask questions. But as he rode along the levee path skirting the Motagua River, he stopped several times where the bank had caved away.

"Bad places here, Van Deven," he said. "We should have a full crew repairing these breaches."

"Both the levee and the pruning should be behind us," I said. "Now the fruit months are here and men can't be spared for such work. Brent hasn't had his old drive since that last attack of malaria."

Craig's lips tightened as he pushed on. Farther downriver on the East Forks was a strip just cleared of jungle. The crew of natives who should have been planting it worked aimlessly or leaned on their tools.

Craig bellowed a stream of Spanish invective too fluent for me to follow. The mustache of the round-faced little foreman bristled like a wire-brush, and the machete cut over Pablo Valente's right eye turned a vivid scarlet. A Honduranean reputed to have killed several men in machete fights in his own country, he was our most able foreman. I tried to tell Craig this, without succeeding in catching his attention.

Pablo defended himself with equal profanity, blaming the delay on insufficient supervision. He didn't want to set in the banana bits until Brenton determined the spacing of the new planting, and how could he, Pablo, decide this when he'd never seen the report of the fruit company's soil expert? Twice, Pablo declared, with skyward rolling eyes and wildly gesturing hands, he'd asked Señor Paul Brenton to give him instructions.

Craig ignored this explanation. He cursed the foreman's shiftlessness, questioned the legitimacy of his children, cast doubts on the virtue of Pablo's parents and even suggested several lower species of animals from which he pretended to believe the foreman had descended.

Wild anger burned in Pablo's eyes and he trembled with fury. His eyes kept straying to a machete one of his men held, but before he could seize the blade, Craig hurled fresh insults which required answering.

"Never," cried Pablo in a wrath-shaken voice, "have I heard a man with tongue so foul except a certain—" For the first time he carefully scrutinized the assistant overseer's face. Then, with a jubilant cry, he ran forward, his swarthy face alight. "*Amigo mío!* Don Kendall!"

My knees shook as Craig grinned and swung to the ground. He gripped Pablo's hand, good-naturedly slapped him on the back, and asked about Pablo's son who bore his name and his two girls.

"Ho!" cried the foreman. "Since last I saw you I have two more sons!"

A pleasant smile relieved the severity of Craig's face. "I'll drop by and see them. And maybe," he added, his eyes twinkling, "your wife will give me some of her excellent tortillas."

"*Por qué no, señor?* She makes the best damn tortillas in the district."

For another ten minutes Craig asked questions about Pablo's family; then, growing businesslike, he inquired about the planting. When he asked me about the soil expert's report, I remembered that the new acres were very rich due to topsoil deposited by former floods. Craig decided to lay out the rows for the bits then and there, and, walking over the burned-over acres with Pablo, he placed stakes at sixteen-foot intervals. The men were busily setting in the bits when we left.

"No more land's going to be burned over if I can help it," he said, as we rode on. "It cakes the ground and encourages grass."

Farther on he pointed out a banana walk where water suckers had been pruned out without being replaced by sword suckers. At two other points drainage had been neglected until plants were beginning to rot.

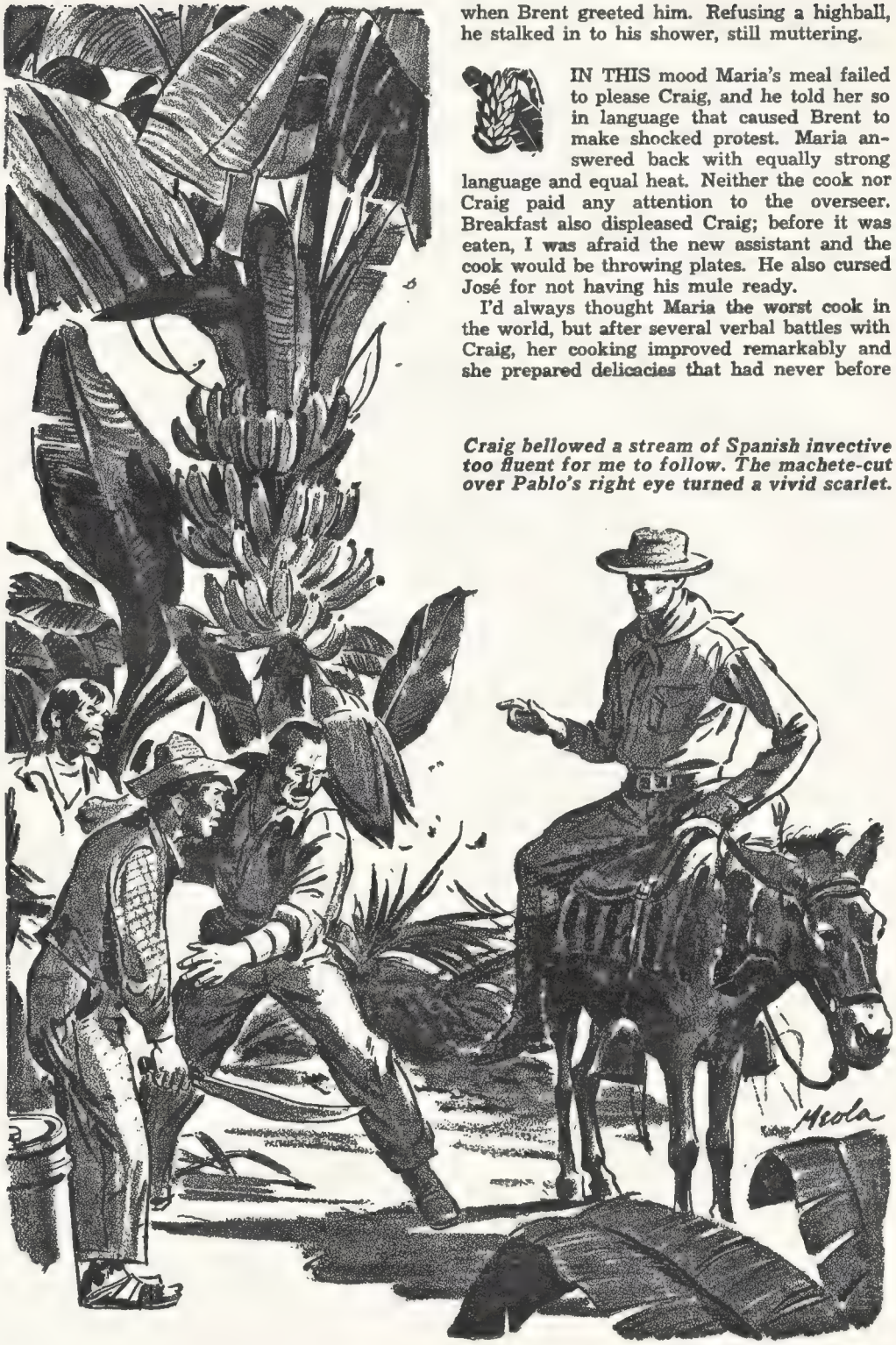
"This drainage can't wait until after the fruit months," he declared.

He stopped at the workers' shacks to see Pablo's children and Charlie Davis' brood, and while the smiling, excited native women clustered around him, he let the older children ride his mule up and down the tracks. He was contentedly munching Señora Valente's tortillas as we left. Further evidence of neglect, however, had so angered him by the time we returned to the bungalow that he fairly growled

when Brent greeted him. Refusing a highball, he stalked in to his shower, still muttering.

IN THIS mood Maria's meal failed to please Craig, and he told her so in language that caused Brent to make shocked protest. Maria answered back with equally strong language and equal heat. Neither the cook nor Craig paid any attention to the overseer. Breakfast also displeased Craig; before it was eaten, I was afraid the new assistant and the cook would be throwing plates. He also cursed José for not having his mule ready.

I'd always thought Maria the worst cook in the world, but after several verbal battles with Craig, her cooking improved remarkably and she prepared delicacies that had never before



Craig bellowed a stream of Spanish invective too fluent for me to follow. The machete-cut over Pablo's right eye turned a vivid scarlet.

appeared on the table. She couldn't do enough for Craig, but he continued roaring at her and she continued defending her cooking at every meal. For the first time since she'd come to Haida, Maria began singing as she went about her work. And José spent hours shining Craig's boots and rubbing his mule gear with saddle soap.

Craig never had a civil word for the houseboy, however, until the day the mule kicked José. Craig carried him into the house like a baby and laid him gently in his own bed so he could determine whether José were injured. He was not, but Craig nevertheless insisted that he stay in bed.

The same changes taking place in the house seemed to be taking place on the *finca*. Craig operated like a gas-engine, in a series of explosions, and since the natives operated similarly, I thought Craig's arguments with native foremen might sometime result in bloodshed. But there was more heat than fire in these verbal duels. And the natives never forgot that if they were in trouble, the new assistant overseer was their friend. More than once after quarreling with Craig, a worker appeared at the bungalow the same night because his wife or one of his children was ill. Craig went along with the man regardless of the weather, and if atabrine or cascara failed to effect a cure, he sent the sick person along next day to the company hospital. Not until they started calling him *Mandador*, a term usually reserved for the top overseer, however, did Brent realize that his men now considered Craig the top authority.

Brent had changed markedly since Craig's arrival. No more siestas, no more days of loafing at the bungalow. He was in the saddle from six until time to take a shower before dinner. Apparently he'd taken Craig's threats seriously, for he pushed the pruning through and despite the necessity for maintaining the regular weekly fruit shipments from Haida, he set crews to replacing the water suckers that had been cut out with six- to eight-foot high sword suckers. After weeks of trying to outdo Craig, I sensed that Brent was again becoming fit and hard.

Craig was taking a good deal of authority into his own hands, and rapidly gaining the ascendency with the foremen and workers. He was giving Brent no excuse to fire him, but at the same time he acted at times as though he were the overseer and Brent his assistant. It was difficult for Brent to quarrel with him for pushing through neglected work, even though Craig often acted without consulting his superior. But I wondered how long Brent would stand for Craig's assumption of authority.

The clash I'd been expecting came one night when we were sitting on the screened porch after supper. We'd exhausted the "banana talk" of the day, and conversation had languished. The three of us were toying with lukewarm highballs and staring out at the *cocuyos* spinning their firefly webs of greenish-blue light in the velvet darkness. The moist, hot air was weighted with the corruption of decaying jungle vegetation, and alive with sounds—the chant of *cigarras*, the harsh croaking of tropical bullfrogs, the imperceptible breathing of the bush, broken now and then by a crash and the distant snarl of a jaguar.

Craig finally broke the silence. "Guess I'll start a crew digging some new drainage ditches on the East Forks tomorrow."

I sensed from Brent's sudden tenseness that he'd been awaiting some such opportunity. The outline of his lean face tightened into sharper, clearer-cut lines.

"I'm taking charge of that, Craig."

Craig's short laugh had a sardonic note. "You've had charge of it for a long time. I want to see it done."

Brent's voice was sharp: "You seem to be assuming a lot here, Craig!"

"Time someone did!"

Brent laid his glass carefully on the table. For a moment the two men's eyes warred. "While I'm overseer here, Craig, I'm giving orders. That clear?"

Craig's face was set like concrete, only his angry eyes showing any reaction. "Suppose you give some, then," he said roughly. "I can't sit on my caboose doing nothing while this *finca* goes to hell."

"You'll see that we cut a seven-hundred count tomorrow."

"I could do that and supervise a work crew as well," Craig snapped. "How long are you letting the levee go?"

"I can't spare men now. You push through the fruit cutting."

Craig said, "O.K.," brusquely, and rising, stalked into his room.

During the fruit months of May through August, Brent kept Craig in charge of cutting, while he pushed through new planting, drainage and other maintenance jobs that had gone undone in some cases for nearly a year. But with cutting and hauling of fruit demanding most of the crews, there were too few men to do more than repair a few of the levee breaches.

So the heavy rains in the first week of September caught us unprepared.

Old-timers say the low country of Guatemala has a "rainy season and a rainier season"; rains are followed by days when the country steams and the air is like a Turkish bath.

The early September rains were different. During the last weeks of August the air thickened to the saturation point, your clothes clung like flypaper, and the muggy heat was almost unbearable. The low, sullen clouds were pregnant with rain which never fell. Clothes mildewed overnight, leather became bearded with

mold, and an opened pack of cigarettes grew soggy within an hour.

Then the skies burst like an exploded water tank one day while we were eating lunch. The drumming on the roof and the cascadelike splashing brought us out to the porch. The gray falling sheets beat down the leaves of the banana plants across the track until they drooped and hung in tatters. Half a mile away the Motagua's low murmur had changed to a seething, hissing sound like water plunging down a flume. Even so far off we could hear the thrash of branches bent and struggling against the rising rush of waters.

"I'm going to put another crew on the levee," Brent said, but there wasn't much concern in his voice.

When I rode down to the river later that afternoon, there seemed little reason for alarm. The sandbar where the alligators usually lay sunning themselves was under several feet of swiftly flowing water. Lower branches of trees along the banks whipped in the current. But the river was still four feet below the top of the levee. Logs, whole trees and part of a rowboat swirled and bobbed along as I watched. I was glad to turn back to the house, for my shoulders tingled from the hard-beating rain.

CRAIG and I waited until dinner was nearly cold and were about to go out and look for Brent when he rode up to the barn. José donned a slicker and had to help him to the house. The whiteness around his tight mouth grew more marked as José tried to remove his right boot.

"What's the matter?" Craig asked. "Sprain?"

"The mule slipped on the levee," Brent muttered. "I jumped off so he wouldn't fall into the river. In struggling, he stepped on me."

Pushing José away, Craig tried to pull off the boot, but in the end had to cut the stitching at the back to remove it. Brent's ankle was swollen enormously. He alternately dunked it in hot and then cold water until time to turn in, without materially reducing the swelling.

All night the rain beat on the roof, and by morning it still fell almost like a cloudburst. Craig suggested that we ride over to the river, The ground was so soggy that the mules plunged ankle-deep in mud after we'd left the tracks, and sometimes we had to dismount before they could continue. The Motagua was now less than two feet from the levee top, and huge chunks of undermined earth caved in and were swept away in the seething brown current every minute. It made me dizzy watching, for I could feel the relentless sweeping power.

"Now we'll pay for neglecting this levee! We'll be lucky if the whole *finca* doesn't wash out!"

"It can't rain this hard much longer," I said.

Craig snorted. "It doesn't need to! The river will be in our laps before the day's out."

He sat motionless in his saddle, with the rain streaming from his slicker and sodden hat.

"If I were in charge," he mused, "I'd call off the remaining fruit crews and all the men not working. I'd beg Quirigua for every man and mule the interior farms could spare."

"But you *are* in charge," I said in surprise. "Now that Brent's laid up—"

A glimmer of a smile touched his lips and flickered out. Without another word, he wheeled back toward the house, and I followed, at a loss to understand what he had in mind.

José ran out to take our mules into the barn and rub them down, while Craig and I hurried into our rooms to peel off drenched clothing. I dressed and stepped into the living room to find Craig pouring himself a stiff jolt of rum. He held up the bottle, but I shook my head.

He sat down on the porch, taking a long pull before answering Brent's anxious questions about the river.

"She'll be over the top before nightfall," he said coolly.

Brent leaned forward apprehensively. "You sure?"

Taking another sip, Craig nodded.

"Then you'd better assign some crews to building up the levee. I'll phone Quirigua—"

"I'm staying here, Brenton."

Brent's lips parted. "You're *what?*"

Craig raised his glass. "This suits me. My guess is the river will be rising for another forty, maybe fifty hours. Think I'm going to stand in water that long and risk pneumonia when it's comfortable here?"

Brent looked dazed. "You mean you're quitting?"

Craig said, "You catch on fast. The payoff, remember?"

Brent gripped his chair arms with white fingers, his eyes narrowing.

"I see," he said slowly. "This was what you were waiting for."

"Right," Craig said. "Here's where slack work catches up with you, Brenton. And me, I'm sitting here enjoying the show."

Brent's breathing quickened. Then, abruptly, he lurched to his feet and, leaning on the cane the houseboy had cut him, called hoarsely, "José, my mule!"

Craig looked startled. "You're not riding with that ankle?"

Brent hobbled off to his room without answering. When he reappeared, he was wearing a riding boot on one foot and a rubber boot on the other. Ignoring Craig, he turned to me.

"Call the super, Van. Tell him I want all the empty sacks and tools he can spare. I'll need men and mules, too, if he can get them here."

Craig expelled his breath. "Brent, you win! I'll go—"

"You can go to hell!" said Brent, and hobbled out to the waiting mule.

I got the superintendent on the line, and he promised to do what he could. But other river farms were begging for men and supplies.

Gulping down the hot coffee Maria brought me, I told José to saddle my mule. Craig sat listlessly with his head sunk on his chest as I went out. The rain still fell like water over a dam.

"José," I said, after mounting, "tell Maria to make plenty of coffee and sandwiches. Bring them over to the crews in my big knapsack."

"You can go to hell!" Brent roared at Craig, and hobbled painfully out to the waiting mule.

I found Brent on the levee, directing work from the back of his mule. He had already ordered one tramcar of empty sacks brought to the river, and men were filling them with earth, while other men had torn up part of another tram track and were laying it up the side and along the top of the levee. The earth was steadily caving away at a low place in the bank.

"Ride downriver," he directed me, as a new crew reported for work. "Have those men fill in any breaks you find."

"We can't beat this," I said "It's rising too fast."

"We can lick it if it stops raining in the mountains. The levee's higher than this, most places."

Half a mile to the northeast, the river was eating away the bank in enormous gulps. Currents eddied and swirled and the earth slid away in wagon-sized cascades. I told Pablo Valente how to fill the sacks and pack them into the breach, together with what brush and tree limbs his men could find time to cut. Then I left him with my crew, and rode downstream.

Soon I found another low spot. The levee wasn't breached, but the river was almost level with the path. I hurried back, and ordered half of Valente's crew to bring their tools and sacks to the new danger point. After they'd started work, I hurried back to report to Brent.

MY crews were holding on by their teeth, building up the low places barely as fast as the river rose. I was so busy directing the battle on my section that I scarcely had time to speak to Brent when he rode by. Half an

hour later, he returned, his lips white with strain.

"The water's already seeping over down below where we did the new planting. Davis' crew can't keep up with the rising water. If we don't get men quickly, we're beaten."

An hour later I was still trying to hold on with my inadequate crew. But knowing that if the levee were broken northeast of me, my own work was useless, I rode downriver to discover whether Charlie Davis could save the threatened East Forks.

Nearing the eastern end of the farm, I was startled to see perhaps a hundred men working. Some filled sacks, others loaded them onto burros and mules. Drivers cursed and kicked the animals struggling through the deep mud as they ascended the levee, and though the line was tangled here and there by a mired or stubborn beast, the work as a whole went smoothly.

I realized these must be crews the super had sent us, but wondered how they'd known to come to the precise point where they were most needed. Then I saw a big white man at the top of the levee. Bare to the waist, he was directing traffic, ordering the men unloading the filled sacks of earth, and even heaving a sack now and then when the natives were too slow. When he turned, I was startled to see it was Craig.

He glanced up briefly as I approached, but continued to shout orders to the men piling sacks along the levee. When the line had somewhat thinned, I spoke.

"Thought you were bowing out, Craig."

A suggestion of a smile twitched his hard mouth. "A guy with only one good leg whipped me," he said drily.

Brent may have beaten Craig, but he could never have beaten the river without Craig's help. I realized that as the hours passed and more men were brought by freight cars from interior farms. Craig fitted them into his smoothly-working team. We needed a good man at East Forks, a driver, a man for whom the men would work until they were dead tired and then work hours longer because they liked their superior.

But even with Craig's help, I never thought we'd hold the levee. The rain continued falling through that day without letup. Then exhausted crews had to be sent back to their shacks in relays for a few hours' sleep that night, to be awakened later by other exhausted crews. The plunging mules, the weary little burros, slipped and slid climbing a bank which had become little more than slush. Sack after sack of earth went down to raise the levee, to close breaches, to hold threatened slides.

Only the food and coffee José brought the crews enabled the weary men to continue working. Brent looked ready to drop from his saddle, but I couldn't induce him to return to the house for a brief rest. Craig's voice was but a shell of a husky whisper, and he could scarcely hold aloft the lantern with which he was directing the men.

I don't know how we could have gone through the next day if the superintendent hadn't come with more men, announcing that the rains had stopped in the mountains. But by midday the river was still rising, and Brent saw the crews were about whipped.

He rode east and asked Craig to see what he could do. Craig passed along the line, stopping to curse and laugh with the foremen and the men, patting natives and Negroes on the back, sending the weariest off for a few hours of dead sleep. It was Craig, I think, who made it possible for us to hold the river until it began dropping at five that afternoon, two hours after the rain had stopped. He suggested then that all but a skeleton crew be sent off to rest, and Brent concurred.

We were so stiff with fatigue that it hurt just to sit down at the table.

Brent said wearily, "Craig, I could have killed you when you told me you were quitting. But you—you saved . . ." His head nodded, and then his glassy eyes opened dazedly. "What was I saying? Oh! I'm recommending you to the super—as overseer—another farm."

"Won't be necessary," Craig said thickly. "Got better job. Company trouble shooter. That's why I came here. Farm in bad way."

That caught Brent's attention. "What?"

Craig smiled wryly. "Brent," he said, "the super made a lot of allowances for you. Figured you'd missed too many boats. Stale."

"Why didn't he fire me?"

"I begged him—give you another chance. I remembered what a jolt it was when you had me fired. I tapered off on the bottle after that, went to work for an independent banana *finca* on the west coast, and did such a good job the company took me back."

"You asked the super to give me another chance? Why, Craig?"

"I'd been waiting for the day to pay you back. I had you where I wanted you. And then—occurred to me that I owed you a lot . . . straightening me out in time. So I suggested to the super that he let me throw a scare into you, on the chance that you might fight to keep your job. You did, and the final proof was when you had enough guts to try to hold the Motagua with one ankle so badly sprained you couldn't stand on it."

Brent sat staring at Craig; then a tired smile lighted his face.

"If you'd only told me, Craig, that you'd fallen off your mule because you had typhoid."

An odd smile twisted Craig's mouth. "I couldn't," he said. "You see, I didn't have typhoid until a month after you fired me. I fell off my mule because—well, because I was dead drunk."

ILLUSTRATED BY
JO KOTULA

BABY FIGHTS BACK

By WILLIAM C. CHAMBLISS

THE STORY THUS FAR:

THE converted baby aircraft carrier, U.S.S. *Traverse Bay,* Captain BILL MEADOWS commanding, with F6F Hellcats and TBF Avengers aboard, is ordered to South Pacific duty. She is Meadows' first ship after a term of swivel-chair service ashore, and the skipper is inordinately proud of his new "Baby" and on tenterhooks to get her to where she can start trading punches with the Nips. All the way from San Diego to Pearl Harbor he puts the flat-top and her complement of fliers through an intensive course of pre-battle maneuvers and training operations. By the time "Baby" reaches Hawaii her company—fliers and crew—is a well-oiled, smooth-running, team-working force, hot to get into the fight.

It's a terrific letdown, of course, when the admiral at Pearl, instead of sending Meadows Jap-hunting, orders him to take aboard a marine dive-bombing squadron of SB2Cs plus a couple of hundred of the marine personnel. The leathernecks are to be transported in convoy—with particular orders to avoid Jap-infested areas at all costs—to Kwajalein, where "Baby" is to disembark them, then proceed to Espiritu Santo and take aboard planes needing repair and freight them back to Pearl as soon as possible. Griping at having to do cargo-craft duty, Meadows sails for Kwajalein. On the way a radio message is intercepted announcing that Eniwetok, held by our forces, is under attack by planes from Jap carriers.

Meadows, instead of staying out of trouble as ordered, dumps overboard enough marine aircraft to give him room to catapult his own fliers into action—he has had to stow his own squadrons with folded wings below to accomodate the SB2Cs—and turns "Baby" toward the trouble spot to engage the Jap carrier force. The whole operation depends on maintaining radio silence and our besieged forces on Eni-

wetok, of course, don't know "Baby's" aircraft are in the vicinity. They haven't enough gas to bomb the Jap ships and return to the *Traverse Bay* so it is up to the carrier's executive officer, JIM PARKER, who tells the story, to shepherd "Baby's" planes on to a landing on Eniwetok without being shot up by American flak from the attacked island. He knows that an old friend—"SHORTY" SCARLETT—is in command on the island and decides to try to contact him by radio in a personal way, identifying himself so that his fliers can land without being shot at.

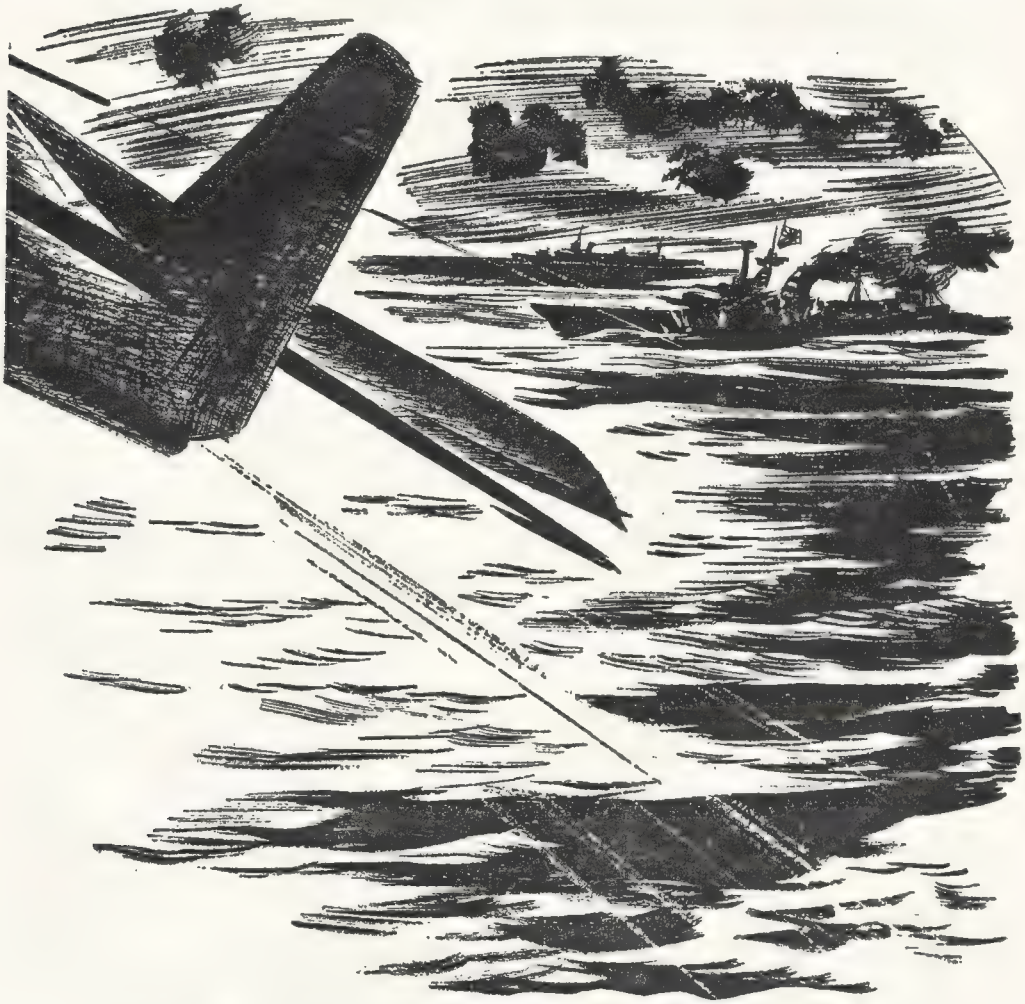
PART II

THIRTY-FIVE minutes out from the carrier, I heard the short, tentative hiss of an unmodulated carrier wave momentarily emitted by a plane transmitter. Someone, I thought to myself, believes he sees something. That brief signal emission was the result of an unconscious reflex action as a pilot pressed the button of a microphone held between tense fingers.

"Planes low at three o'clock," I heard my turret gunner say over the interphone.

Dropping the right wing, I stared into the mist, and saw three TBFs vaguely outlined against the lower overcast. Those would be the torpedo planes that had been brought up from the hangar deck and launched right after the fighters got away. I knew Huntington, commanding our fighter squadron, had instructed them to make maximum speed to join up with the main striking group.

Cautiously, I drew ahead, losing altitude to bring my plane to their level out of gun range. Then I reached for the signal switch on the control panel, and blinked a brief recognition



Tracer from our turret and tunnel guns were pouring into the Jap and I wrapped up in a steep climbing turn to get altitude for another attack.

flash on my running lights. Immediately, I saw an answering flash from the leading plane.

"Have you sighted main group?" I spelled out.

"Negative," came the answer. "Expect rendezvous ten minutes."

I "rogered" in acknowledgment, and then climbed to take station above and astern of the TBFs. Unhampered by the weight of a torpedo, my own TBF was a pretty maneuverable ship. From a higher station, I could serve as lookout and furnish a little fire support in case some Jap should take a pass at the other three. I knew that by this time the fighters would have caught up with Huntington and the main striking group, so that they were fairly well covered.

Suddenly, from above and ahead, I saw a dim speck rapidly growing larger. Coming from a danger bearing, it might be a Jap. I hauled around and up to have my fixed guns in a position to bear. Then I relaxed as I saw that the wing was almost midway up the fuselage of the newcomer. That meant he was not a Zero, but almost certainly a Hellcat. He was one of the "weaving Charlies" of the fighter cover, who had spotted us and come back to investigate.

The Hellcat swerved sharply to circle me, prudently out of gun range, like a wary dog making sure that the hound from down the street is still friendly. I flashed a recognition signal and he answered promptly.

"Main group ten miles ahead," he signaled.

I acknowledged and blinked out to him: "Last three TBFs ahead and below me."

He receipted and whirled to race back and pass this word to Huntington. I dove and signaled the dope to the three TBFs..

So far so good. It was now certain that all our planes would be together by the time the attack started. With eighteen SB2Cs and five loaded TBFs, we could do a nice job on the Japs—if we found them. That's the trouble with going after a carrier. The damned things move around. Unlike a land base, which can't get out of the way when danger threatens, a carrier is a nimble proposition capable of shifting like a smart boxer to evade attack.

Our one big hope was that the enemy didn't know we were anywhere around. His second striking group had no doubt by this time reported that Eniwetok had been unable to put up any serious airborne opposition. So the Jap would, as a result, figure on no serious peril from aircraft attack. He knew—indeed, he had clearly planned his attack on the knowledge—that weather would have immobilized the other bases within striking distance.

Unsolved still was the question as to whether this enemy strike was merely one aimed to damage the Eniwetok base and cause a diversion of our surface forces from their attacks in the western Pacific, or a serious attempt to retake Eniwetok. We'd know the answer to that when we got in sight of his force. If it consisted only of a carrier and screening force, then the attack was merely a raid. But if there were transports with it, then it was a real invasion.

Below me, the three TBFs were drawing away. I cranked on a few more inches of manifold pressure to stay within sight of them. Almost immediately I saw some dark spots skimming along just below the lofty blanket of alto-stratus clouds. Twelve planes, they were, in sections of two, disposed in a right echelon of sections. That would be the Hellcats furnishing high cover for the striking group.

Slowly sweeping the sky downward, I picked up the SBCs, flying at about nine thousand feet. Of the total of eighteen, I could make out only twelve, flying in a V of two-plane sections. I knew that Huntington had strung out the remaining six on a scouting line to either side of his main body, seeking to make contact with our target.

Scanning still farther down, I saw the last three TBFs just joining up with the two which had been catapulted from the carrier at the start of our flight operations.

I climbed slowly to take station astern of the fighters. My work would not begin until after the attack was over, or until the planes were ready to start back without having located the target. I didn't bother to fly up near Huntington. He would have plenty on his mind without being bothered just then. I itched to shift the radio to Eniwetok's frequency, and find out what was going on there. But I didn't dare for fear of missing the contact report that should be coming in any instant from the first plane to sight the target.

Again the transmitter's carrier wave hissed momentarily. I strained to hear the message. Once more, there was only silence broken by the interminable static. I could picture the strained faces of those back on the *Traverse Bay*, waiting like expectant fathers. Meadows had risked everything on one throw of the dice. If this attack failed, the Japs would certainly search until they located the little flattop. And then there would be one bright flash, followed two weeks later by a communiqué issued in Washington that she wasn't any more.

"Contact!"

To ears strained to catch a whisper, the word smashed with the impact of the bark of a five-incher.

The amplifying report came quickly through the static.

"This is one six," the plane identified itself. "One flat-top, two heavies, six tin cans and two beef boats relative two five distance six."

What a prize—if we could bag them! A car-

rier, two heavy cruisers, six destroyers and two transports. A full-scale landing force for a target like Eniwetok.

Now the radio was busy, as Huntington barked out his commands.

"O.K., you marines. Go get 'em," he shouted, to tell the skipper of the SBCs to choose his time for making the dive-bombing run.

Through the light mist, I saw five of the scouts rushing in to join up for the attack. The sixth, who had made the contact, was staying where he was to keep from losing track of the enemy.

From the fighter group just ahead of me, six Hellcats peeled off to come down and cover the dive-bombers in their attack. So far, we had seen no enemy planes. But there would be some around.

The whole formation had altered course twenty-five degrees to the right to the reported bearing of the target. I searched the holes in the lower overcast for the target.

"Flat-top turning into the wind," the scout reported.

"Pilot from turret," my gunner called through the interphone. "Wakes on the starboard beam."

BELOW, the gray water was furrowed by six streamers of white. And at their ends, I saw a luscious sight. A Jap carrier of the *Shokaku* class, two *Chikuma* class heavy cruisers and four destroyers were racing around a sharp turn into the wind. Looking more closely, I could see planes parked on the forward end of the flight deck. Then I knew we had caught the Jap with his pants down. He had spotted everything forward in preparation to take aboard the planes of the second group striking at Eniwetok.

Somewhere in the sky between the island and us, a flock of Jap planes, their ammunition exhausted and their gas getting low, would be heading this way expecting to be taken aboard. Probably, even this soon, they had received an inkling from the carrier's radio, that a different reception might await them.

On the carrier's deck, I could see a few planes at the rear of the group start to move aft. The Jap was frenziedly trying to respot his aircraft far enough aft to get launched into the air.

"Group one stand by."

It was the voice of the marine squadron commander, calmly calling his attack signal. I saw ten of the SBCs draw away, and shift into right echelon. He was apparently going to make the attack in two waves. A good idea. The Jap would certainly start evasive maneuvers which, though they might throw the first group off, would be uncovered for the second group.

"O.K., lads, let's get down there."

That was Huntington telling his torpedo planes he would maneuver them into position for the diving approach that would follow closely after the marines' bombs landed.

I looked back toward the dive-bombers. Only eight could be seen, circling like hungry eagles waiting to descend on their prey. The first wave was already on its way.

Against the grayness of the sea, I could not make out the camouflaged, diving planes. Fine points of yellow and orange were dotting the decks of the enemy ships, and black puffs hanging in the air indicated that their anti-aircraft guns were working. But surprise is a strong factor in favor of the attacker. Their fire control party wasn't hitting anywhere near the range.

Briefly, I saw an SB2C outlined against the water as he recovered from his dive. An instant later, there was a spout of water and a spreading circle of white foam as the bomb hit the sea just off the carrier's bow.

The carrier had started a reverse turn to throw off the bombers. A second bomb landed close aboard on the port beam. While it probably shook up the Jap a bit, I knew, from having been on the receiving end of such near misses, that its effect was far from fatal.

As I stared down, there was a brilliant white flash on the carrier's flight deck just abaft the island.

Almost immediately, the ship was shrouded in a spreading pall of smoke. Angry red and yellow flames broke out, and shot skyward through the churning cloud.

In the usual fashion of their kind, the Jap cruisers and destroyers were sheering away from the wounded carrier. Snaky waves marked their frantic zigzagging as they abandoned the flat-top to its fate. But there was plenty of stuff left in the carrier. Her anti-aircraft guns —those which hadn't been put out of action by the bomb hits—were blazing away, and the white line of her secondary bow wave, well back from the stem, showed she was making a good twenty-five knots.

It was just as the carrier had started another reverse turn, and was, as a result, momentarily steady on a course, that the TBFs roared in for the kill. No longer were the puffs of Jap anti-aircraft fire so brilliant when seen from above. They had trained out to fire horizontally against the most deadly menace of all—determined torpedo attack.

As though giant buckshot were being fired into it, the sea was roiled in a mad pattern of foam and spray. The Japs were not only shooting at the TBFs, but were trying to throw up a wall of water, the effect of which would be as lethal as a direct hit.

The torpedo planes were attacking in two sections—a section of three in the lead, closely followed by a section of two. I couldn't see

the splash of their drops. But I did see the white streamers of their wakes as they started toward the target.

That Jap carrier commander was a competent ship handler. Despite the fact that two large areas of the flight deck were blazing furiously, he was doing exactly the right thing to evade the latest bunch of his tormentors. The giant ship seemed to spin on her heel as he rounded toward the attacking planes to present as small an exposed area as possible to the onrushing torpedoes.

He almost succeeded. Three of the wakes shaved within a stone's throw of his bow. A fourth ran right up to the hull, and then continued beyond. It had been set to run too deeply, as sometimes happens in the complex mechanism that is the modern aerial torpedo. But one was a lulu. A blast that threw debris even higher than the smoke of the bomb hits shattered the starboard quarter.

Only a diminishing wake and a broadening cloud of smoke marked the track of the carrier now. A tell-tale oil slick paralleling the wake revealed that at least some of her fuel tanks had been ruptured. But the smoke of his own desolation served in a measure to give the Jap protection from further attack, because the second wave of dive bombers could not see him well enough to aim their bombs.

"Take the cruisers!" I heard a voice call out on the radio as the second wave of dive-bombers started to go down. From down in that inferno of bursting bombs and screaming shells, the marine skipper was still calling his signals, telling his second wave to pick targets that they could see.

The eight remaining SB2Cs divided into two divisions of two sections each, and set out in chase of the heavy cruisers. Those two ships, their anti-aircaft guns blazing, were racing northward with the destroyers slightly astern adding their contribution to the fatal black dots that filled the sky.

Through a hole in the clouds, I saw two enormous flashes on the deck of one of the cruisers. Seemingly without stopping, the ship just snap-rolled in the water, its shattered hull momentarily displaying its keel before it broke in two and slid beneath the surface.

The second cruiser, a little more nimble and a little luckier, got off with one hit close to the rail on the port quarter. Smoke poured from an instantly raging fire, but the ship continued on her way, her speed apparently reduced only to twenty knots.

There was still plenty of work to be done down there. But with bombs and torpedoes expended, our planes had done all they could on this trip.

"Join up!" It was Huntington's voice, ordering the planes to re-form for the trip back to the carrier. Up to that point, I had refrained from calling Eniwetok to arrange for the marines to go there, because I didn't want to jam the frequency when the attacking planes needed it.

Now, as I raced toward the rendezvous position, I decided to tell Huntington what the plan was.

"Huntington from Parker," I called, using our surnames instead of the more complicated plane calls.

"Go ahead Jimmy," he answered promptly.

"When you've all joined up, proceed at low speed toward the island," I said. "I'm calling them now to arrange for the marines to go there."

"Roger," he answered.

The first few planes were circling for the rendezvous about five miles ahead of me.

"Eniwetok from one victor zero one," I called, after telling my radio operator to shift to the Eniwetok frequency.

"This is Eniwetok, over," a voice came through the static.

"This is one Victor zero one," I told them. "Can you take Marine Bomron seven three three to arrive there in one hour? Over."

"Roger," the voice answered. "Wait."

I KNEW that my signal was being made the subject of a lot of discussion back at that bomb-riddled island. And the dominant note in the discussion would be rank suspicion of the nationality of the sender. Radio deception is a finely developed art in modern warfare. Any outfit dull enough to accept a message as authentic just because a friendly call letter preceded it wouldn't last long in the Pacific zone. But I wanted to follow whatever lead they indicated in the matter of identifying myself.

"One Victor zero one," the call came. "This is Eniwetok. What is the signal number of the pilot of your plane?"

"Six three four six six," I answered. "Tell Shorty Scarlett to look that one up."

Again I was told to wait. For five minutes, only static greeted my ears. I gathered that they were sending for Scarlett to come to the microphone himself. A Jap might know my name and signal number. But he'd scarcely know how to imitate my voice.

"One Victor zero one," the island operator paged me again. "What were you doing in the fall of 1932?"

That was a neat piece of business, I thought, as I searched my memory for something that had happened in that year to associate me with Scarlett.

Quite obviously, Shorty had something in his mind, something so inconsequential that only he and I would remember it. Then I remembered that he had been on the flagship

of the cruiser division of which my ship was a member.

"Eniwetok from one Victor zero one," I called. "Tell Shorty Scarlett that in the fall of 1932 I was regularly drinking him under the table at the Red Barn in Guantanamo."

"Now I know you're a Jap, you big bum," came Shorty's voice over the circuit. "I was the guy who carried you back to the motorboat every time."

He broke off with a loud chuckle.

"I don't know how you got here, Jimmy," he went on. "But you sure are welcome. Send the soldiers on over. The landscape isn't as pretty as it was this morning. But they can land on the runway."

Is using the word "soldiers" to refer to our marines, Scarlett was employing a traditional navy term by which marines are familiarly addressed.

"O.K., Shorty," I told him. "And you owe these boys a drink when they get there. They've taken care of your visitors very nicely. One Victor zero one out."

"We'll take care of 'em, Jimmy," he told me. Then ended with the formal sign-off, "Eniwetok radio out."

I shifted back to our own frequency to call Huntington, who was gathering up his boys a few miles ahead and about a thousand feet below me.

"Johnny from Jimmy," I called. "Send the soldiers to the island when you're all joined up. They're cleared to approach on standard friendly bearing."

"O.K., Jimmy," he answered. "Will do."

Slightly above me, the Hellcats had re-formed in two-plane sections. I counted them, and noted with relief that all were there. They had had a lucky break. The Jap had been unable to launch any planes, and those returning from the island had undoubtedly been too low on ammunition and gas to risk tangling with our fighters.

I made out Huntington's TBF circling in a wide turn. Three more were maneuvering to join up with him. There was no sign of the other.

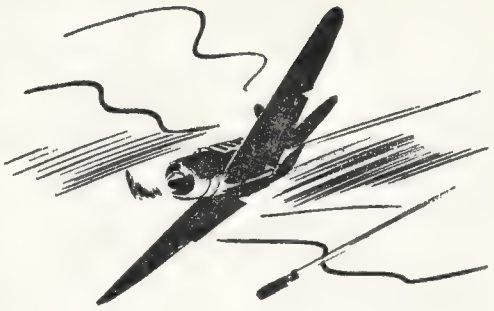
"Number five from flight leader," I heard Jimmy calling. There was almost a pleading note in his voice as he continued, "Answer up, Tony. Answer up."

The scratching growl of the static mocked him in reply.

"Huntington from Brodie. Over." The marine squadron commander was calling from his rendezvous circle some three miles away.

"Go ahead, soldier," I heard Huntington answer.

"I saw one of your boys go in," he reported. Then even through the static you could hear his voice break a little. "And three of my crew are gone, too."



By the grim boxscore averages of war, we had got off cheaply. One TBF and three SB2Cs would be reported as "our losses were negligible" when the final story of the engagement came out. In terms of damage done the enemy, that would be true. Four pilots and six aircrewmen constituted very few casualties compared with the number of Japs on whom the sharks would dine that night. But in those ten American homes which would in a few days receive dread expressions of official sympathy, our losses never would seem light.

"Brodie from Huntington, over," I heard the flight leader's radio calling.

The marine skipper told him to go ahead.

"Take your boys to Eniwetok," Huntington told him. "They'll be looking for you. Use standard approach and recognition procedure."

Brodie acknowledged, and I saw the SB2Cs, now rendezvoused, wheel away toward the south. In a few minutes, they were out of sight.

Huntington straightened out on the return course to the ship. His remaining TBFs followed closely in cruising formation, while the ever watchful fighters took station overhead.

Sitting up there like a 4-F rejectee, with neither a torpedo nor bombs on board, I had burned far less gas than the others. So I decided to turn back for another look at the enemy. Accurate estimate of damage would be vital not only to our own ship's future movements, but to Cincpac and the other strategic commanders as well.

I notified Huntington that I was turning back, so he wouldn't include my plane in the periodic check-up every flight leader makes on the number of planes in company with him. Then I reversed course and headed back to the point where we had last sighted the Japs. Overhead, the clouds were thinning rapidly. Occasional brief flashes of sunlight swept across my plane. The lower overcast had practically all burned off.

It was not difficult to locate the Japs this time. A column of dark smoke rising high in the sky marked the position of the carrier. As I came over the area, I could see two destroyers lying almost dead in the water. Near

them, there were little splashes, occasionally marked by a flash of flame. Dropping down a bit, I saw that the splashes were made by returning Jap planes landing in the water. They had no place to go. Apparently, these babies, like many Nip aircraft, did not have self-sealing tanks, for the occasional bursts of flame I had noted from the higher altitude now revealed themselves as caused by burning aircraft which had ignited on crash-landing in the water.

The destroyers abandoned their rescue work and got under way when they sighted my plane. Apparently they thought we were coming back for a second pass. A furious barrage of anti-aircraft fire burst from their guns, but I was still too high to be in any serious danger.

The carrier in which I was chiefly interested, was still burning. But it was clear that the Nip's damage control party was getting the flames in check. The damaged cruiser had completely extinguished her blaze, and was now maneuvering to take station close to the carrier's starboard bow. I had an idea of what they were trying to do, but I knew they would all maneuver to avoid attack as long as I remained visible. Hence, to let them progress with their plans to the point where their intentions were unmistakable, I climbed into the thin, high overcast.

Twenty minutes later, I returned to the scene, and dove out of the cloud cover for a last look. As I suspected, the Jap cruiser had been getting into position to take the carrier in tow. During my absence, they had succeeded in getting a line aboard, and now were under way on a generally northwesterly course. I estimated their speed at six knots. Three of the destroyers had taken screening stations around the towing group.

At first, I could not locate the transports. Then I spotted them, some twelve miles ahead of the carrier, making a good eighteen knots. Screening them were the remaining destroyers. I wondered why the Jap had detached three destroyers for this purpose, because I knew that the loss of the five thousand troops on the ships wouldn't cause him any concern. There are still plenty of Japs. But I realized that the ships were a matter of more concern. With our own submarines and carrier striking forces taking an ever mounting toll of Jap cargo and transport vessels—without which she could not survive to fight—the Nip officer in tactical command of the battered outfit below me was probably under orders to save those transports at all hazards. To do so, he had dangerously reduced the strength of the screen around his crippled carrier and the cruiser towing her.

The sun was dimly visible as a dull orange ball rapidly descending toward the horizon. I had learned all I could and, further, had little desire to make a night landing on the tiny, pitching deck of the *Traverse Bay* unless it was absolutely necessary. So I hauled around, and stood toward home.

On the way, I gave Eniwetok a call, advising them of the position, course and speed of the damaged enemy. In return, I received the disheartening news that the second Jap bombing wave had knocked out their gasoline pumps so badly that they would be unable to fuel a striking force of planes before the following morning. I knew that, although the weather in this vicinity was improving, Kwajalein and our other Marshall's bases to eastward would be in the grip of the cyclonic storm for the rest of the night. It looked as though the Jap would make his getaway.

THIRTY-THREE minutes later, I spied the little *Traverse Bay* plowing into the wind on a course for landing planes. Almost immediately her signal searchlight was trained on me, flashing a challenge. I answered with my landing lights, and received clearance to fly in and join the landing circle.

Coming in close, I saw that operations were tied up at the moment. And the cause was clearly evident. An Avenger lay disconsolately flat on its belly halfway up the deck. I knew what that meant. As he had cut his gun, the ship's deck had come lurching up to meet the torpedo plane, smashing its landing gear. While I watched, the flight deck crew swarmed toward the crippled plane, lifting it clear of the deck by sheer manpower. Then, en masse, they moved aft. Over the stern went the plane. Scarcely had the splash settled when the landing signal officer was bringing the next waiting Hellcat aboard.

The twilight was waning when the last of the fighters had got aboard, and it was my turn. With flaps and gear down, engine set for maximum cruising revs, I throttled back to a few knots above stalling speed and turned into the groove. The deck had looked small when I took off. It seemed infinitesimal as I started in to land.

It's an old saying on carriers that the last man in always gets a wave-off. But, I told myself, these young squirts aren't going to see it work that way this time. With over a thousand deck landings to my credit, I thought, I can certainly set this thing down the first time, even though it's been some months since I last did it on a much bigger deck.

The signal officer had his arms spread wide in the semaphore letter *R*, telling me that I was coming in just right. The pitching deck drew nearer. Instinctively, I picked up a few feet of altitude to be on the safe side. Instantly, I got a "high" from the signal officer, and obediently settled back down again.

With the fantail a scant fifty yards ahead, I waited expectantly for the "cut" signal to chop my engine and come down on deck. Instead, the

signal officer waved his silly little bats violently over his head in a wave-off order.

"Why the young punk!" I thought to myself as I poured on the coal to go around again. "Where does he get off giving *me* a wave-off. That approach was perfect."

The thought was passing through my head as I went past the stern of the ship to draw ahead for a turn back into the groove. I looked down angrily at the signal officer. Suddenly, he bent over the deck, and pounded his bats in a chopping motion. I guess I would have looked pretty sheepish at that moment if there had been anybody in a position to watch my facial expression. For that signal meant only one thing—I'd forgotten to lower the tail hook that engages the arresting gear.

Somewhat embarrassed at what my two crewmen in the back would be thinking, I lowered the hook and came around again. The signal officer was using lighted wands this time instead of flags, for the tropical night had descended on us with its usual suddenness. Dimly, the shrouded marker lights glowed on the flight deck. I switched on my own running lights so that the signal officer could keep track of my plane's position and altitude.

In a few minutes, I had received my "cut" signal, settled on deck, and felt the reassuring lurch of the plane sharply decelerating in the grip of the arresting gear.

Quickly, members of the deck handling crew dove at the tail, and disengaged my hook from the arresting gear. Ahead, a taxi signalman holding a pair of illuminated Lucite sticks waved me forward toward the group of parked planes huddled at the forward end of the deck.

As I cut the switch, and climbed out of the cockpit, I noticed that the plane crews were busily refueling the aircraft while ordnancemen climbed over the planes refilling the ammunition magazines.

I found the skipper and most of the pilots crowded into the tiny ready room. Meadows was wearing an expression of complete satisfaction, which I could well understand. With a baby carrier detailed to duty as a freighter, he had barged into an overwhelming superior enemy force and turned back an invasion threat to a hard won and vital American airbase.

"Hiya, Jimmy, old boy," he greeted me enthusiastically. "I'm going to break radio silence long enough to let Cincpac know that we've written off a carrier and two cruisers."

"Well," I acknowledged, "you've certainly the right to claim a cruiser sunk. And I suppose a carrier and another cruiser that will have to spend some time in the navy yard could be 'written off'—at least for the time being."

A sudden silence settled over the room.

"What do you mean 'spend some time in the navy yard', Jimmy?" Meadows asked me. "These lads reported they were sure the cruisers and the carrier were sunk."

"Well, I'm sorry to disappoint them, and you," I replied. "But right now that flat-top and cruiser are doing their best to get back to one of Mr. Tojo's service stations. And, personally, I think they're going to make it."

One of the young torpedo plane pilots spoke up.

"But, sir," he said, "I saw my torpedo go right into the carrier and explode. She was just one big mass of flame topside."

"You're right, son," I told him. "But that's as far as you're right. When you say she's sunk, you're just making a deduction. And it happens to be wrong. After more experience at this stuff, you'll find out that you can't call 'em sunk until you see 'em go down. The Japs thought they'd sunk the *Enterprise* in the Battle of the Eastern Solomons, but they've since found out how wrong they were."

Meadows broke in with a demand that I give him all the details of what I knew.

I explained that when I went back for another look, the cruiser was in pretty good shape, and was taking the carrier in tow.

"Didn't you hear me telling all that to Eniwetok?" I asked him.

He shook his head. The static had been too severe in the area of the *Traverse Bay* to make out my voice signals clearly. And the other planes, which were close to me, had not been tuned to the frequency I was using in communicating with Eniwetok.

"But you have no kick coming," I told Meadows. "You've stopped the drive at the island, and you've put a flat-top and a cruiser out of action, besides sinking one. What more could you expect to do with this little bucket? I think you're damned lucky to be still afloat."

But the skipper wasn't even listening to me. He had grabbed the phone to the bridge, and was giving some rapid instructions to the navigator.

"All right, you kids," he said, turning to the young pilots seated in the close-packed one-armed chairs, "get yourselves some chow and turn in. You may have to turn out early."

He signaled to Huntington and me to stay behind while the youngsters filed out. I could feel the ship listing as we changed course to port.

"NOW what gives?" I asked him when the others had left.

"I'm going to get that carrier," he replied.

"But, listen, Bill," I said, forgetting formality, "you can't expect these youngsters to carry out a night attack. That's a job for old hands. And, besides, you haven't got any dive-bombers. With only four torpedo planes, you can hardly hope to knock off the carrier and the cruiser, or even to get back the planes if you send them in without help from dive-bombers."

"I know all that," he replied impatiently. "I don't plan to make an air attack. I'm going to send the destroyers in against them."

I thought he had taken leave of his senses. True, the Japs had only the same number of destroyers as we, since they had sent three of their six ahead with the transports. But there was still that heavy cruiser with her eight-inch guns that could outrange our tin cans and blow them out of the water before they got close enough to hurt.

Meadows took Huntington and me up to the charthouse with him. There, he bent over the chart on which our own track was laid out as well as the last reported position of the Japs.

"We were closing in on the Japs all the time you guys were out," he explained. "So, as I figure it, we're only about ninety miles apart."

He turned to me.

"Now you estimated their speed at six knots, and their course about three hundred and thirty degrees?"

I nodded.

Meadows drew in a line indicating the Japs' probable track, with hourly positions plotted at intervals of six nautical miles. Then he extended our own track line, showing an advance of sixteen knots. For a moment he studied his handicraft critically, then nodded in satisfaction.

"If your estimate is correct," he said, "we're closing in on them at the rate of ten knots. By 0100 we'll be within forty miles of them. I'll send one tin can ahead as an advance scout. He should be able to see the glow from that burning carrier for a good twenty miles at least."

Huntington and I understood that much. But our faces plainly showed that we didn't see what particular difference it made.

Catching up with the Japs was a simple matter.

Tangling with them, and getting out with a reasonably whole skin, was something else again.

"Now here's the plot," the skipper began. Rapidly, he laid out his operations plan before us.

As soon as the destroyer scout had sighted the

One of the young torpedo plane pilots spoke up. "But, sir," he said, "I saw my torpedo go right into the carrier and explode. She was just one big mass of flame topside."

enemy, he was to verify their position, course and speed from a safe distance, and then fall back on our main body and pass the information to Meadows.

Then, Meadows continued, he would send all three destroyers ahead to make a torpedo attack against the carrier and the cruiser. When the destroyers were within fifteen miles of the target, the *Traverse Bay* would launch the four TBFs and all the Hellcats.

"The TBFs will be loaded wtih flares," he explained, "and divided into two two-plane sections. Each of you will lead one section, since you're the only two really experienced pilots I have."

The fighters, he added, would be loaded with hundred-pound fragmentation bombs.

As soon as we took off, we were to take a position about twenty miles beyond the enemy, and wait for a radio signal from the destroyers that they would start their attack in five minutes.

"Then you guys in the TBFs go in wide open at the Japs," he said. "Drop your flares on the side away from our destroyers so that you silhouette the target for them. At the same time, order the fighters to start dropping their bombs from a good, safe altitude. I don't care whether they hit anything or not. Their whole purpose is to make the Nips think it's an air attack, and draw their fire toward the side away from our tin cans."

As Meadows outlined it, the thing seemed workable. If properly timed, the Japs would have all their guns trained skyward and toward the side away from our destroyers. Even if they sighted the tin cans, their fire control parties would hardly be able to bring the guns to bear accurately before the destroyers had launched their torpedoes.

"Anything wrong with it?" Meadows asked us, when he had finished.

"Nothing at all," I told him. "But I'm just as glad I became an aviator. Otherwise, I might have been assigned to one of those destroyers."

There remained one little detail: How to get the word to the destroyers. We couldn't send it by radio, for obvious reasons. Even the ultra-high frequency TBS (Talk Between Ships) transmitters might carry far enough for the Japs to pick up the signal. And we couldn't take a chance advertising our presence by a long-winded blinker light transmission. A lurking enemy submarine might sight it.

"We'll have to chance a short blinker signal," Meadows said, "and have the senior destroyer come alongside us. Then we'll shoot a telephone line across, and talk it over."

Now our destroyers are nimble ships. And their captains are fine seamen—those who aren't don't last very long. But it's asking an awful lot to have one of them come alongside a darkened ship, in a high sea, and hold station so precisely that a telephone wire won't be parted by the yawing of the two vessels.

Here's where we dent some plating—if we don't wreck a ship, I thought.

On our tiny bridge, a signalman trained his screened blinker tube toward the shadowy form of our leading destroyer, barely visible under the dim light of stars shining through occasional breaks in the high overcast. A cautious answering flash shone dimly on the destroyer's bridge. Then our men rapidly spelled out the order for the destroyer to come alongside, port side to, so as to be close to our island superstructure.

I guess the signalman on the destroyer had to do considerable talking to convince his skipper that he wasn't having spots before his eyes. It was a long moment before a skeptical "wilco" came back, informing us that he would comply—or, anyhow, try to.

Meadows passed the word for a bosun's mate and a working party to lay up to the flight deck ready to pass a heaving line and a telephone wire to the destroyer. In a few minutes, they appeared on deck, just abaft the island. A seaman carried the line and the wire. The bosun's mate was lugging a Lyle gun, modern substitute for the good right of the old-time bosun. With the line flaked out on the deck, its end was secured to the small projectile of the gun, and the latter then was slipped down the barrel ready for shooting.

Off to starboard, we could hear the destroyer cautiously dropping aft. She had selected to reduce speed rather than to attempt a turn. A sound decision, because radical turning in the dark with a carrier and two other destroyers in the formation would have been a set-up for collision in a situation already none too comfortable.

As the destroyer fell abaft our beam, she changed course gingerly to the left to close the distance. As she drew nearer, we could see the white caps breaking over her low bow while the whole ship pitched skittishly in the rough sea. A working party, precariously hanging on to the forward turret, stood ready to catch our line.

"Steady down," Meadows barked at the helmsman as the yawing of our own ship slewed the stern dangerously close to the bow of the approaching destroyer. But I think even the skipper realized that the kid at the wheel was doing the best he could under the circumstances.

A scant twenty-five yards from our starboard quarter, the destroyer straightened out as nearly parallel to our erratic course as she could, and slowly began to draw ahead to bring the bridges of the two ships abeam. We could see the phosphorescence of her wake crossing the lines of the whitecaps, disappearing into the gloom astern.

As she drew abreast, and our bosun's mate

raised his gun to fire the line, a sudden whimsy of the running sea sent the two ships yawing at each other. We could do nothing, our ship being as sluggish as she was in answering either engines or rudder. But the tin can skipper apparently rang up emergency full astern, for his ship backed off like a startled dog who has found pepper amid the luscious debris of the garbage can.

After a short interval, probably so the destroyer skipper could recover his poise, the little warship again stood for us to pick up the line. Once more we slowed down to bare steerage way and tried to hold a steady course. Neatly, if precariously, in position, it held station a moment, and then we heard the muffled report of the Lyle gun firing the weighted line across the water from our deck.

Watching through glasses, I could just follow the trajectory. The shot was a good one. I saw the weight strike the side of the turret, and one of the destroyer crew make a grab for it. He seized the line with both hands. And at that instant a heavy wave swept across the tin can's bow. When the water had receded, the man was not to be seen.

"Man overboard!"

Faintly, we could hear that dread shout from the destroyer's deck.

"Stop engines. Full right rudder," Meadows yelled.

We hauled sharply toward the right to get our stern clear of the man in the water. This maneuver also brought us bearing down on the destroyer. With a burst of speed of which only that nimble type of ship is capable, she drew ahead, and we cleared her stern seemingly by inches.

Looking aft, I could see a couple of our men straining to hold the heaving line.

"Belay that line!" our bosun's mate shouted.

The strong drag on the heaving line could mean only one thing. The poor wretch who had been tossed into the sea had managed to keep a desperate hold on the thin, slippery piece of rope. One could almost feel his fingernails being ripped out as he strove to maintain that frail connection with his only hope of salvation, our ship.

The bosun's mate had grabbed up a piece of half-inch Manila flemished down in the gun gallery, and speedily was throwing a bight in its end. I saw him lean over and yell some instructions into the ear of one of his working party. Then he leaped over the side, the bight of the line snugged up under his armpits. Two of his men paid the line out rapidly.

By this time, Meadows had backed down, after the stern swung clear, and we lay to in the trough of the sea. The strain was still on the heaving line, so we knew the destroyer's luckless seaman was still hanging on. But even so, the situation looked pretty bad. It was virtually certain that if our men started to drag him toward the ship, the added stress would loosen his precarious grasp. Even if we got away with that, he could never have held on while we lifted him out of the water. We dared not train out a searchlight. To do so would have invited a salvo of torpedoes from an enemy submarine which could scarcely have missed a ship hove to as we were. And we couldn't take even one torpedo and still stay afloat.

Our destroyers got their cue right away. Through the night glasses I could see that they had closed in a bit, and were running around us in a protecting circle ready to depth charge on the first sound contact. We had two reasons for hoping they would not make a contact. Aside from the fact that it would force us to get under way to evade attack, the depth charging would in all probability kill both men in the water.

Five of the longest minutes I have ever experienced passed in silence as we wallowed in the trough of the sea. Then, from the darkness to leeward, we heard a faint shout. Immediately the men on deck took a strain on the Manila line, and began heaving it in. Even with the glasses, I could see nothing in the storm-tossed sea.

The end was within fifteen feet of the ship's side before we could make out, with a thrill of admiration for our gallant bosun's mate, that there were two men being dragged toward the ship. Then a new peril threatened the men in the water. The ship was rolling so violently that they were almost certain to be smashed against the side when they got close.

"Belay heaving on that line," Meadows shouted through cupped hands.

The men took a turn around one of the arresting gear support arms, and looked expectantly toward the bridge for further orders.

"Jump down there, Jimmy," Meadows told me. "Rouse out some mattresses, and lower them over the side on a line. You'll have to see that they're kept in position between those men and ship's side."

I raced down to the flight deck. A good part of the ship's company was there, for news of the goings-on topside had spread quickly below decks. I told off half a dozen idlers and sent them below to the master-at-arms with orders to bring up the first four mattresses they sighted.

Those kids must have taken the ladders in one jump, because they were back on deck, gasping like distance runners at the finish line, in an incredibly short time. Quickly, we fastened together the loops at the sides of the mattresses, and rove a line through the loops on the last one.

I had the mattresses lowered over the side to a point just clear of the water. To have let

them get into the water would have made it impossible to shift them quickly into line with the men we were to drag aboard.

"All right, lads," I sang out, "take a strain, and bring them in. Slowly does it."

By this time, I had plenty of help. I put six men on the Manila line, and instructed them to walk slowly across the deck with the line, ready to stop when I ordered. A grim silence gripped all hands.

As the two men in the water neared the ship, I slowed the line handlers to a bare creep, while I juggled the mattresses to anticipate the spot where the sea would toss them against the ship. I waited until the ship had reached the extreme end of her roll to windward.

"Take it in, smartly!" I yelled.

As the ship rolled back to leeward, the men were lifted clear of the water. Because the hull was canted toward them, they actually did not touch the ship, since the line, falling vertically from the overhanging deck, hung clear of the side. As the ship started her reverse roll, it was a simple matter to line up the mattresses where they would cushion our survivors.

Marlinespike seamanship is not practiced to the extent it was in those distant days of "wooden ships and iron men." But our bosun's mate would have merited the approval of his predecessor under John Paul Jones. Somehow, he had managed in that turbulent water to throw an extra bight in the stiff Manila line, so that both he and the man he had rescued were riding secure from falling.

We had them on deck in a trice. Despite his protests that he was absolutely all right, I sent the bosun's mate below to the sick bay with orders to turn in for the night. The destroyer man was a stretcher case. After a quick once-over by the doctor, he was strapped in a meat basket and gently carried below.

Before I got to the bridge, Meadows had rung up standard speed, and the *Traverse Bay* was swinging back on her course toward the Japs. Our watchful, well-trained destroyer skippers took their stations without signal, and once more the senior of the trio doggedly began maneuvering to come alongside.

"I hope he's had a chance to sneak something to quiet his nerves," I remarked.

"*His* nerves!" Meadows answered. "What do you think *I've* been going through?"

It didn't take the destroyer very long to get into position for her third try. She'd had plenty of recent practice on that phase of the problem. And this time the fates favored us. The Lyle gun sent the line true, nobody fell overboard grabbing it, and in no time it was made fast on a stanchion atop the tin can's bridge. The end of the telephone wire was made fast to a loose loop around the line, and quickly slid downhill from our deck to the destroyer.

To keep the thing from parting, we stationed two men on our end of the line with instructions to pay out when we rolled or yawed away, and take up when we tended to close on the destroyer.

Meadows clamped on a pair of headphones, and signaled me to do the same so that I would get both ends of the conversation with the destroyer commander. Concisely, he outlined his operations plan.

The captain at the other end of the line was elated and confident.

"I'm glad we're going to have a chance to get in some work on this thing," he said. "We're a little sick of screening that bucket of yours around, and listening on the radio to the birdmen grabbing off all the excitement."

I hoped he would still feel the same way when that Nip cruiser opened up on him with eight-inch guns, and the trio of enemy destroyers started shooting back. The experience of the war to date has demonstrated that, no matter how many thick spectacles one sees in a Jap crowd photograph, they can still fire naval guns in a way to make those on the other end mighty uncomfortable.

"The moon will rise shortly," the destroyer man continued. "If we're on time, it should still be to eastward when the attack starts. I'd prefer to have your planes illuminate from that side, so my tin cans can approach from the opposite direction. I don't want to get silhouetted against the moon trail in the water."

Meadows agreed, and said he'd order the planes accordingly.

"I'll do the advance scouting myself," the destroyer leader went on. "Then I won't have to pass all these details to the other ships. When I've come back after spotting the Japs, I can send them a short blinker signal to tag after me."

I could understand why he wasn't anxious to try going alongside each of the other destroyers to pass the whole story to them.

"Send me a brief signal, too," Meadows told him, "to let me know your estimated time for reaching the attack point. I don't want to send the planes in too early and alert the Japs."

It was then agreed that when the destroyers were ready to start their final dash toward the enemy they'd broadcast one word, "Prep," on the aircraft radio frequency so that we'd dive in to carry out our part of the show.

With a brief "See you after we've sunk 'em," the destroyer cast off and stood away swiftly in the direction of the enemy.

"Turn in and try to grab a little shut-eye, Jimmy," Meadows told me. "You're going to have a busy time of it in another four or five hours."

I heard Meadows giving the air officer final instructions on the loading of flares and bombs as I started below to hit the sack for a few

hours. I guess I was asleep before my head hit the pillow.

THROUGH my sleep-sodden brain there drove a terrific din. I jumped out of my bunk and headed for the passageway on the run as the insistent blare of General Quarters sounded on the bugle.

"Something's gone wrong," I thought. "The Japs have come at us."

Then I glanced at my watch. Nothing was wrong at all. I had been asleep for nearly four hours, and apparently we were preparing to attack right on schedule. Putting on red glasses to prevent night blindness due to the glare of the lights, I made my way to the ready room.

Meadows was standing there, waiting for the pilots to assemble. A messenger of the watch handed me a cup of super-heated coffee as I nodded a greeting to the captain.

Huntington came in right after I arrived. Although he had been through enough action that day to rate a man a long rest, he showed no obvious signs of weariness despite the brevity of his spell below. Years of standing the mid-watch, of long scouting flights, of dawn-to-dusk general quarters build up a certain capacity to go without sleep. It's something which can be acquired only after a long time.

By contrast, the younger pilots, who had turned in earlier than Huntington and I, were a bunch of sleepy-eyed kids when they joined us. You couldn't help feeling sorry for them. In a better world, they would be back on their jobs, or at school or maybe looking for a little place out in the country to take their newly arrived first-born away from the noise and grime of the city. Instead, those more normal phases of their lives were being postponed, in some instances forever.

Meadows, who had not turned in at all, wore that set expression behind which veterans of the sea conceal the dragging weariness of sleepless hours on the bridge. I saw his eyes covertly studying each new arrival to discover if something more than lack of rest was affecting any of them. A plane or two fewer in the maneuvers to distract the Japs' attention would be more to our advantage than to have some kid dope off and snarl up the formation at a critical juncture in the operation.

Apparently he decided they were all fit for the job. He turned toward the blackboard on which had been graphed the latest information on the enemy position, course and disposition.

"Our three destroyers are on their way now," he told us. "They will be in position to commence their attack in an hour and a half. I want the last plane airborne thirty minutes before H-hour. That will give you plenty of time to get on station."

He explained how the targets were disposed when last sighted. The cruiser was shown as towing the carrier. The destroyers were disposed in a semicircle ahead, distance some four thousand yards from the carrier.

"Our latest information," Meadows went on, "is that the Japs are getting the fire under control. It may be entirely extinguished when you get there. So all hands keep a sharp lookout for wakes. You TBF pilots have your rear seat men on the alert to notify you if they sight anything."

He then added that, with the Japs' position precisely known, coupled with the fact that there would be some moonlight, we should be able to hit them on the nose with reasonably good navigation.

"The TBFs will cruise at nine thousand feet going out," he concluded. "Fighters will take station two thousand feet above them, about a quarter of a mile astern. Close up if visibility gets poorer.

"Commander Parker will be in tactical command. You know the general attack plan. Wait for his orders, and then let 'em have it."

Then the air officer took Meadows' place, and began giving us the ship's position, her course and speed after launching, and the latest wind data—all vitally necessary to us when we started our return flight toward that tiny speck that was home in the broad, dark expanse of ocean.

As soon as he had finished his spiel, we dug out our chart boards and computers to put the heading and time calculations on them for future reference in the air. I made it a point to glance over the shoulder of each youngster lest sleepiness or excitement cause him to lay down an incorrect vector. Theoretically, they would all be following my plane. But it's easy to get separated at any time, particularly so at night. Hence, each pilot must be prepared to make his way back to the carrier alone.

From the flight deck came the screech of starters and the roar of powerful engines coming to life. The plane crews were giving them a preliminary warm-up to minimize delay when we were ready to take off.

Huntington and I walked off to a corner of the room to perfect our detailed illumination plan. To reduce the time we would be on a straight course while dropping flares, it was agreed that we would split up so that his section approached toward the tail end of the enemy formation, while I would bring my two planes in toward the center. Then we would swing sharply to the right, parallel to the enemy's course, and commence dropping simultaneously.

"When your last flare is away," I told him, "haul out to eastward. After that, use your own judgment about strafing. I think it would help the destroyers if we could give the enemy tin

cans a going over with our machine guns. Let me know, if you decide to go for one of them, so we don't barge into each other."

He then brought up the matter of using the fighters to strafe, too.

"Those six fifty-caliber guns could do a lot of good down there," he pointed out. "And I have some crack shots in this outfit for all their lack of experience."

I didn't relish the idea of too many planes milling around in the blinding glare of our flares. At the same time, I realized that even with the element of surprise in their favor our destroyers were up against a tough proposition. Those *Chikuma* class cruisers are modern ships, presumably with up-to-date fire control apparatus. This one was damaged, but we didn't know how badly. If she ever drew a bead on one of our tin cans with those eight-inch guns, it would be curtains for the destroyer.

I finally agreed that if the situation developed so that fighters could be profitably employed against the surface craft, I would call them in by radio, designating specific targets. We called over the six Hellcat section leaders and passed along the word on this phase of the attack.

Huntington and I walked out on deck to take a look at the one situation which is ever uppermost in a pilot's mind—the weather. The ship's pitching was less violent than when I had turned in. The wind had veered around to a northerly direction, indicating that we were well out of the track of the typhoon. Overhead, major stars were visible through thin overcast, with widening areas of lesser ones shining through patches of clear sky. As we stood there, the moon poked its upper tip tentatively above the horizon, then climbed rapidly as though to cross this troubled area as speedily as possible.

The engines had been throttled back to about 800 rpms, a speed at which they could warm up without fouling the plugs. Streamers of blue flame torched aft from their exhaust stacks, studded briefly by specks of brightly burning carbon.

"Stop engines!" we heard the air officer roar through the bull horn.

The exhaust flames damped out, propellers twirled to a stop, and silence reigned on the deck. Then we could hear the ticking of exhaust stacks cooling off, a noise nostalgically reminescent of similar sounds in wintertime at home when the furnace is shut down for the night. It started me thinking of two who waited back there. They would probably be down at the beach if the day were clear. One would be paddling with the joyful delight of a five-year-old in the sparkling blue of the Pacific. The other would be keeping careful watch on her with thoughtful hazel eyes, eyes which might now and then stray wistfully in the direction of a baby flat-top five thousand miles to westward.

"Pilots! Man your planes!"

THE harsh blare of the bull horn cut in on my reverie. Checking to make sure that my gun nestled snugly in its shoulder holster, and that my knife hung in its scabbard, I climbed into a life jacket, picked up the chartboard, and walked over to the TBF looming on the deck in the number one take-off spot.

"Morning, sir," the plane crew chief greeted me.

"Morning Jalowski," I answered. "Plane in good shape?"

"Running like a clock, sir." he told me, lending a hand with my chute harness.

In a few minutes, we had wound up the starters and the engines were turning over again.

"Turret and tunnel from pilot," I spoke into the interphone, "are you all squared away?"

"Turret, aye aye."

"Tunnel, aye aye."

The ship listed. Looking forward, I could see the dark outline of our bow sweeping past the starry horizon as our carrier swung onto the launching course. Missing was the familiar sight of the plane guard destroyer. If anyone goes into the drink this time, I reflected, he stays there.

Just off my starboard wing, a plane director held up his Lucite sticks and signaled me to taxi slowly ahead to the starting line. After stopping me by holding them aloft in his outstretching hands, he pointed one at a dim figure holding a single illuminated stick. That would be Fly One getting set to send me off.

Less than a minute later, the carrier had steadied on course, and I was speeding down the deck for a take-off. With only scant pitching to bother us, the business was quite simple. Smoothly we left the deck, and began the slow right turn that all planes make after clearing the bow, in order to avoid sending a continuous slip stream back along the deck.

As I climbed toward the rendezvous point, I looked down. A thin shaft of blue light was rushing forward on the carrier. An instant later, my number-two man was airborne and climbing to join up. With the second section of TBFs promptly on station, I began counting the exhaust flames of the Hellcats which were being launched with commendable speed.

The eighth fighter started down the deck. From where I watched, it seemed that his exhaust flame had a wavering quality, as though the engine were choking up or cutting out. I saw the blue flame cross the bow. Then the entire scene was briefly and glaringly illuminated by an awful blast of light. For an instant,

the carrier and her few remaining planes stood sharply revealed by an unearthly radiance.

As suddenly as it had come, the flash subsided. But no blue exhaust trail moved up to join us. The signs needed no interpretation. Some luckless fighter pilot had crashed into the sea, and his bombs had exploded setting off the gasoline as well.

In such times, routine and discipline demonstrate their worth. Although every one of those flying in our formation knew what had happened, not one plane wavered from its place in the disposition. Below, the awful blast had scarcely subsided when the tell-tale trails of blue resumed their racing progress toward the bow telling us that the last two fighters were getting away promptly.

With all hands joined up, I straightened out on course to intercept the Japs, slowly climbing at the same time. The Hellcats promptly grabbed off extra altitude to maintain their assigned distance above and abaft the TBFs.

The static so bothersome the previous afternoon had completely disappeared. So complete was the silence of the radio that I called back to my operator to spin the main tuning dial to pick up any stray signals he could to be sure the thing was working.

". . . are nearing the doors of our sacred empire," I heard. "We will teach these attackers that our men will die before their land will be despoiled."

It was the regular English-language tripe put out by Tokyo radio. How different a tune they were singing from their boastful threats of conquest two years before! I wondered how long it would be before they made some mention of the work we had started the previous afternoon and would now complete if all went well.

The earphones were silent again as my operator reset our receiver on the assigned operational frequency. Luminous hands on the navigational clock on the control board recorded the elapsed time of the run since completion of rendezvous. Despite delay caused by the fighter's crash, we had joined up three minutes ahead of schedule. I changed course a couple of degrees to the left so that we would pass well astern of the Jap disposition. No use alarming them before the destroyers were set to start their attack.

Every few minutes, I swiveled my head to check on the planes. Astern of me, close aboard, my number two's exhaust shone plainly. Farther aft, the twin blue flames of the second section of TBFs reassuringly held station. Above, the first, second and third section of fighters were in place. Then came a single exhaust flame, followed by a blank space where the crashed lad would have been flying had the fates been kinder. Behind the blank space, the last two Hellcats spewed out their incandescent streamers.

The clock said we were only five minutes from the target. I strained to pick up some evidence of the enemy. But the blackness of the sea below was unbroken. A bad break for us. The Japs had apparently put the fire out. I felt the clutching grip of fear speed up my breathing as I realized the predicament our destroyers would be in if we missed the enemy.

Quickly, I changed course to the right so as to pass directly over the computed position of the target. If we had to depend upon seeing wakes, we would have to pass them close aboard. The moon's dim radiance served only to create imaginary images in my straining eyes.

Three minutes later, we were passing over the calculated position of our targets. Somewhere in the darkness beyond, our destroyers would be waiting to start their attack. For a moment I thought I saw a wake, and started a circle to verify it. But at that instant, all doubts were resolved. A single anti-aircraft shell burst about a quarter of a mile from us, and its detonation seemed to touch off a conflagration below. The stupid Japs had opened fire on us, although we were well out of range. And the flame of their guns outlined each ship brilliantly.

But it looked as though we might lose the surprise advantage for our destroyers, because it was still five minutes before the time agreed for them to start their runs.

"Prep. H-hour minus two minutes."

It was a radio signal from the destroyer leader, and he was using the old bean. It meant that, instead of waiting five minutes, he was going to start his run in two minutes. The Japs, concentrating on us, and obviously rattled by our appearance, would scarcely pay much attention to the possibility of a surface attack right then.

"O.K., guys," I shouted into the radio. "Let's get going."

By this time, it scarcely made any difference whether or not we popped our flares. The Japs, with their anti-aircraft going full blast, were setting themselves up in swell fashion as targets. Even the carrier, so badly hit that afternoon, apparently was able to man a few guns, for infrequent, erratic muzzle blasts flamed along her dark mass astern of the cruiser.

With Huntington's section tagging along, I jammed on full gun, turned to work up on the moon side of the Jap formation, and maneuvered into our predetermined position to start lighting. Then I called to Huntington that I was starting my run. Immediately, his section hauled away. As I straightened out in a diving approach toward the center of the Jap formation, I could see his section's exhaust pattern paralleling us to port, distant about a thousand yards.

The kids in the Hellcats had a picnic with the destroyer. A few of her guns threw up a feeble defense, but she was zigzagging in a violent way.

The Nips had us fairly well spotted, and flak was beginning to burst fairly close, although their gunnery was lousy by our standards. Ordinarily, there's nothing wrong with their shooting, so I figured that surprise and their own evasive maneuvers were throwing off their aim.

AS WE neared the target, I called to my wing man to open out the distance in order that we could both be free to do some jinking to confuse the surface gunners when we turned parallel to their formation and began dropping flares.

A thousand yards from the nearest Jap destroyer, I hauled sharply around and popped my first flare. A few seconds later, the ships were weirdly outlined in its bright glare. I began jinking violently then, for small-caliber tracer was beginning to come too close. My flare release handle was busy, and the scene below took on a brightness that approached that of daylight.

In fifteen seconds my flares were away, and I turned steeply to the right on a retiring course. A glance backward told me that my number-two man was tagging right along. In half a minute we were out of range of the Japs' guns, and I turned once more to get a look at what was going on. For nearly a mile, our parachute flares hung in the dark sky, like the array of bright lights suspended over the ring in a night boxing show.

The cruiser had cast off her towing hawser, and was churning up white water in an effort to crank on speed to evade the air attack she thought was coming. The destroyers were racing around in erratic pattern, firing their guns at the unseen threat concealed in the night sky. Alone, deserted, the crippled carrier lay starkly tragic in the center of our pattern of light.

The fighters got on the job immediately after we retired. Tiny flashes of bursting fragmentation bombs pockmarked the surface. Despite my instructions that they were to stay high and drop their bombs at random, some of those kids must have been sneaking down in dive-bombing attacks. Four hits in quick succession were registered on the carrier's broad deck. Others burst close aboard the cruiser.

"Where the devil are our destroyers?" I asked myself. Then I glanced at the clock and realized that we had been in action only a minute and a half. Time can pass pretty slowly when someone's shooting at you.

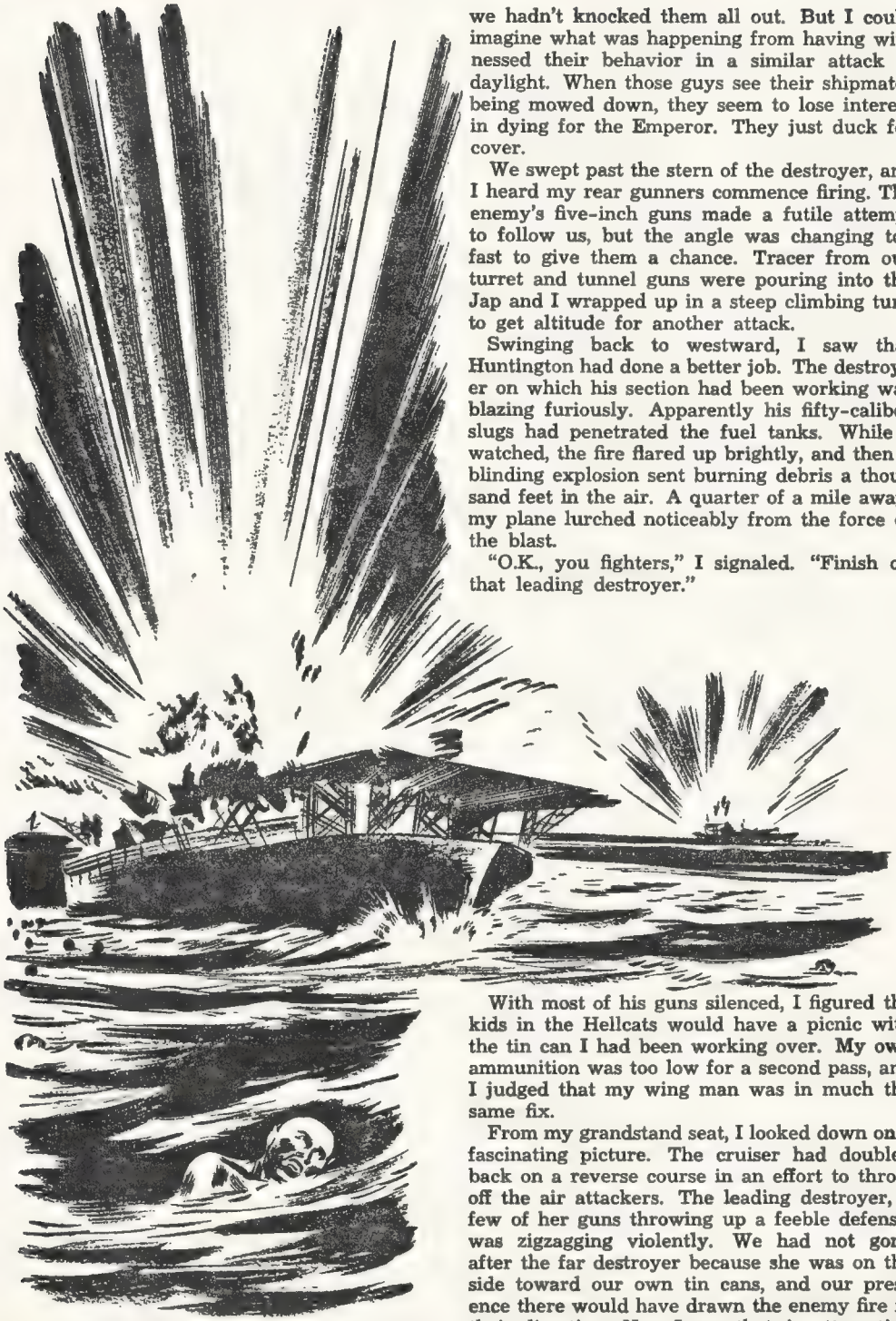
"Huntington from Parker," I spoke into the radio. "I'm going for the leading destroyer."

"O.K., Skipper," he answered. "Mine's the one on this side."

With my wing man snugged up, I poured on the coal and started a high speed dive for the destroyer. The Jap gun crews, their eyes blinded by the glare of the flares, were shooting in a wild, aimless pattern. But as we dove down I noted with satisfaction that all the fire was coming in our general direction. Not one shell was being lobbed toward the side on which our destroyers would be making their attack.

Roaring down toward our target, I was suddenly half-blinded by the glare of a searchlight that the ship had lit up. It swept by us in its first probing swing, but I knew it would be back on in a few seconds. I pressed the trigger on my stick. Tracer from my fixed guns hit into the water short of the destroyer. I heard the stutter of my number-two's guns firing, and the searchlight went out as though it were a candle snuffed by a giant's hand.

Our firing had given the Japs' small-caliber gunners a point of aim. Their tracer began creeping our way. Again I pressed my trigger, and almost simultaneously I saw tracer from the guns of the plane astern streaming past my right wing. We were only two hundred yards from the destroyer then, and about seven hundred feet off the water. The after machine guns on the Nip suddenly ceased firing. I knew



Instead of cold, dark water, the sea was a spreading cauldron of fire. Those Japs must have had full fuel tanks.

we hadn't knocked them all out. But I could imagine what was happening from having witnessed their behavior in a similar attack in daylight. When those guys see their shipmates being mowed down, they seem to lose interest in dying for the Emperor. They just duck for cover.

We swept past the stern of the destroyer, and I heard my rear gunners commence firing. The enemy's five-inch guns made a futile attempt to follow us, but the angle was changing too fast to give them a chance. Tracer from our turret and tunnel guns were pouring into the Jap and I wrapped up in a steep climbing turn to get altitude for another attack.

Swinging back to westward, I saw that Huntington had done a better job. The destroyer on which his section had been working was blazing furiously. Apparently his fifty-caliber slugs had penetrated the fuel tanks. While I watched, the fire flared up brightly, and then a blinding explosion sent burning debris a thousand feet in the air. A quarter of a mile away, my plane lurched noticeably from the force of the blast.

"O.K., you fighters," I signaled. "Finish off that leading destroyer."

With most of his guns silenced, I figured the kids in the Hellcats would have a picnic with the tin can I had been working over. My own ammunition was too low for a second pass, and I judged that my wing man was in much the same fix.

From my grandstand seat, I looked down on a fascinating picture. The cruiser had doubled back on a reverse course in an effort to throw off the air attackers. The leading destroyer, a few of her guns throwing up a feeble defense, was zigzagging violently. We had not gone after the far destroyer because she was on the side toward our own tin cans, and our presence there would have drawn the enemy fire in their direction. Now I saw that, in attempting to escape, the last Jap ship was rushing westward, almost directly into the path our ships would follow in their attack.

Suddenly, I saw three crests of white foam come under the glare of the slowly falling flares. In an instant, I made out the shapes of our three destroyers, tearing in at a good thirty-five knots in a perfect line abreast.

Simultaneously they changed course in right-angle turns. Two of them turned to the left, paralleling the carrier. The third spun to the right and drew abeam of the fleeing cruiser. Because I knew what to expect, I could see the white spray thrown up as their quintuple tubes erupted their torpedoes. At the same time, their five-inch guns opened up a deadly hail of steel on the surprised cruiser. Almost immediately, her upper works burst into flame.

Too fascinated to look elsewhere at the battle scene, I watched the carrier and the cruiser whose doom had been inexorably ordained when those torpedo tubes fired. Faintly, I could discern the wakes—ten parallel, silvery streaks of death heading for the carrier, five grimly racing to intercept the cruiser. My hands gripped the stick and throttle, and I braced myself as though destruction were threatening me.

I guess I must have closed my eyes involuntarily, a reflex action to shield them from the searing glare of the torpedoes' detonation. Above the roar of my engine, I heard and felt a deep, spine-shaking shock. When I looked toward the scene, incandescent parts of the two ships were curving across the sky and splashing into the sea. At least, it should have been the sea. But instead of cold, dark water, this liquid was a spreading cauldron of leaping fire. Those Japs, I thought vaguely, must have had almost full fuel tanks.

A blaze of lesser magnitude was in progress half a mile to the northward outside the vast area of burning oil. Before I could orient myself to identify it, I heard an exuberant young voice coming over the radio.

"Flight Leader from Fighter Group," the voice shouted. "We've finished the tin can."

"Well done," I replied, realizing how inadequate was the navy's stock phrase of high praise. "Rendezvous."

Then a new voice, which I could not at first identify, came shouting exultantly over the radio.

"O.K., you junior birdmen," it said. "When we hit 'em, they stay hit!"

I realized, then, that it was the destroyer leader, giving voice to some well-deserved gloating.

"Roger," I answered. "Do you plan to let that last destroyer get back to Tokyo to carry the news to Hirohito?"

"Don't be impatient," he retorted. "We'll tag him in a minute."

Glancing astern, I saw that Huntington had somehow managed to locate me in that mess of flaming confusion, and was steadily holding station as I climbed toward our agreed rendezvous position. Some distance ahead, faint blue streaks told me that the Hellcats were joining up with their leader, getting squared away to follow us home.

FIVE miles to westward, gun flashes spurted across the silvery rippling of the moon's reflected light. A long line of three dense groups identified the rapid-fire broadsides of our three destroyers. A lone group of scattered firing marked the desperate Jap trying the hopeless task of shooting it out with three times his number of guns.

Five-inch tracer shells pounded into the Nip. In less than a minute, he was running in a crazy circle, flames climbing skyward from his after hull and superstructure. Stubbornly, his forward guns continued firing. Then a salvo blasted them into silence. In the light of his own flames, I saw the enemy ship slowly heel over while shell after shell poured into his hull. Then the riddled ship, her back broken, split into two parts and disappeared.

"All right, Airdales," came the destroyer leader's voice, "you can run home and go to sleep now."

"Thanks," I answered. "Sorry we can't give those mudscows of yours a fast tow."

I checked back on my planes. Moonlight gleamed on their spinning propeller blades, flashed occasionally from shining windshields. They were all there. Beneath the clear tropical sky, I shaped course for the carrier. We rode softly on the calm warm air. Behind us, a diminishing red glow marked the arena of our night engagement.

Half an hour later, a pinpoint of light blinked out a challenge. I winked back an acknowledging code letter on my running lights. Immediately, parallel faint strings of lights outlined the landing path of the carrier's deck. She was already headed into the wind. We flicked on our approach lights, and lost altitude to form the approach and landing circles off the carrier's port bow. The Hellcats took station at one thousand feet, while my TBFs dropped down to five hundred.

Checking back, I saw that my number-two man and Huntington's section had opened out to landing interval. I dropped my landing gear, opened the flaps, trailed the hook and set revs and manifold pressure for approach speed. Two minutes later, I was taxiing forward on the darkened deck. As I cut the switch, my crew chief jumped up on the wing to help me unload my chart board and other gear.

"We heard it all on the radio, sir," he said. "A swell job."

"Thanks, Jalowski," I answered. A little stiffly, I climbed out of the cockpit. My turret and tunnel gunners followed. From the after

end of the flight deck, we heard the muffled crunch of the next plane hitting the deck and engaging the arresting gear.

In the ready room, Meadows was waiting for us. Elation had erased all signs of fatigue. It was difficult to believe that he had not been asleep for nearly thirty hours.

"A damn fine show, Jimmy!" he greeted me. "A clean sweep, wasn't it?"

"There's nothing left out there but some floating shark food, well done," I told him, and launched into a full narrative of the night's doings to fill out the details which he could not have learned from listening to our brief radio chattering.

While we talked, the other pilots streamed into the room. Huntington wore a quiet smile of satisfaction. The youngsters, boisterously excited, were all talking at once, each telling his own story and nobody listening. They quieted down when they saw Meadows.

"For what you have done today," he told them, "you will long be remembered among your fighting comrades in the navy. You have not only done a fine job; you have learned an important lesson. You've seen that it's teamwork—teamwork between plane and plane, teamwork between planes and ships—that spells victory.

"You have heard a lot of loose talk about air power as an easy road to victory. But you have seen, as you will see in future action, that it is not air power which will bring us victory. It is power—air power, sea power, military power—expressed in a united striking force of men of courage who will beat down those who dared to attack our country."

Then he went on with a hint of soberness in his voice, "In our service, courage and ability are considered part of the standard makeup of our people. As a result, the navy does not scatter medals around in great quantity. It is quite possible that not one decoration may be awarded for what has been done today.

"But you know you have won the respect of the finest fighting service in the world. That, and the knowledge that you have struck the enemy a telling blow, may be your only reward. But I think you agree that such a reward is not an inconsiderable one."

Then, apparently a little abashed at the realization that he was making a speech, he suddenly broke off with a brief, "Now get some sleep; there may be more work to do after sunrise."

I lingered after the others had left, interested to know what his plans were for the immediate future.

"We'll rendezvous with the destroyers in about an hour and a half," he told me. "Then we'll head for Kwajalein to unload those marine ground crews."

I thought I had succeeded in concealing an almost irrepressible yawn of weariness. But I guess it didn't work. Meadows grinned at me.

"Get below, and turn in," he said. "What would your wife say if she knew you were gallivanting around the romantic tropics in the wee small hours?"

I trudged below and hit the sack. Sleep came with no special effort on my part.

I awoke with the drowsy impression that the ship's motion had changed. We were rolling gently in a cross sea of no appreciable magnitude. Lazily, I looked at the hands of my watch, and then leaped out of my bunk as I saw that it was almost eight o'clock in the morning.

Turning on the water in the wash basin to lather up for a shave, I pressed the button to call my room boy. Almost immediately, his grinning brown face appeared in the doorway. He had brought a cup of coffee.

"Washington," I said sternly, "what's the big idea of not calling me at sunrise? You knew I was supposed to be on deck then."

"Captain's orders, suh," he told me. "Said you was to sleep jes' as long as you could. Said he'd skin anybody alive what woke you up."

I thanked him for the coffee, gulped it down, and climbed into my duds on the double.

ON DECK, the weather was a blaze of brilliant sunshine, reflecting off deep blue water. A few scattered whitecaps formed in the fresh, moderately cool breeze. The destroyers, disposed in their screening disposition, pranced like happy puppies in the moderate sea. Plane crews and flight deck personnel were sunbathing along the wide expanse of deck, which was devoid of aircraft. I caught the faint drone of airplanes and saw, dimly outlined against the high blue vault of the sky, a formation of Hellcats on station as our combat patrol.

I found Meadows on the bridge. He could not have had more than a few hours' sleep, but you could never have guessed that from looking at him.

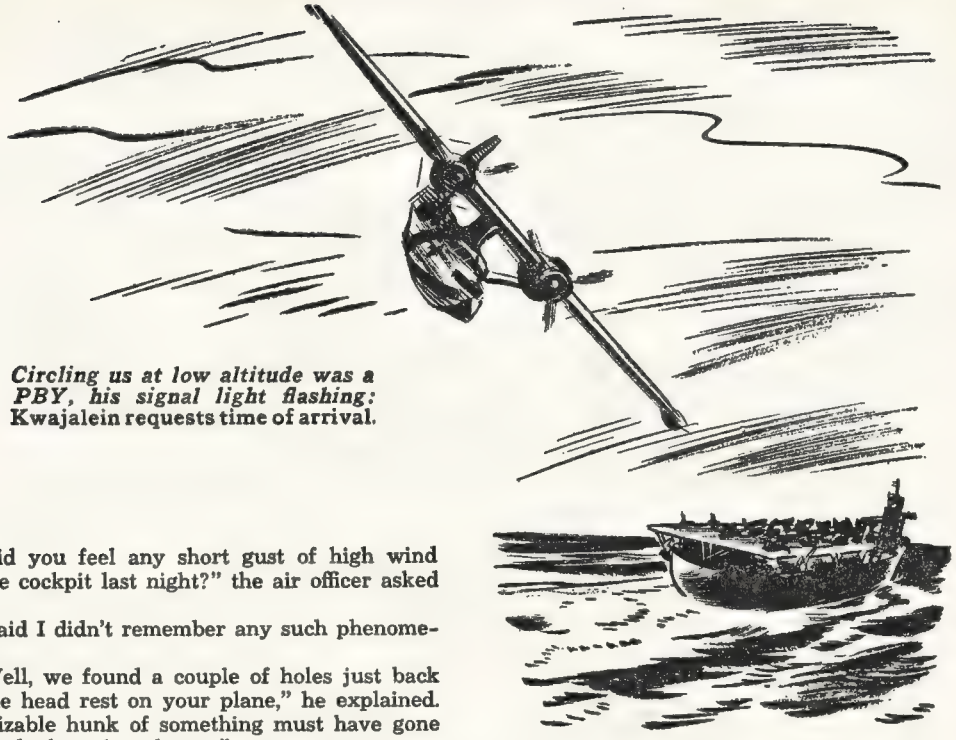
"Hi, Sack Hound," he greeted me. "If you hadn't been snoring so loudly when I looked in on you this morning, I'd have told the boys to build a pine box. You were out cold."

He explained that we were then about 280 miles northwest of Kwajalein. We were timing it to arrive the next morning. It was too far away for us to reach that day, and he soundly decided not to try conclusions with a strange harbor approach at night.

"I've sent two TBFs on ahead with a short action report," he explained. adding that he had asked the Kwajalein radio to transmit it to Cincpac.

A messenger came up the ladder, saluted, and handed him a dispatch. It was from Kwajalein, addressed to Eniwetok, with us as an information addressee. MARINE BOMRON 733 ARRIVED KWAJALEIN 0815, it read.

I drifted down to Air Plot.



Circling us at low altitude was a PBY, his signal light flashing: Kwajalein requests time of arrival.

"Did you feel any short gust of high wind in the cockpit last night?" the air officer asked me.

I said I didn't remember any such phenomenon.

"Well, we found a couple of holes just back of the head rest on your plane," he explained. "A sizable hunk of something must have gone through there in a hurry."

He added that our only damage was a few similarly small items on three of the Hellcats. The planes had been sent down to the hangar deck for repairs.

An increasingly loud drone of engines reached our ears. I walked out on deck. Circling us at low altitude was a PBY, his signal light flashing: *Kwajalein requests your estimated time of arrival.*

Our own signal searchlight shuttered a reply, telling him that we would be off the entrance to Gea Channel at 1030 the next morning. The plane flashed an acknowledgement and turned away on its assigned search course. A hundred miles or so from us, it would transmit the message by radio. Then no listening Jap radio direction finder would be able to figure our position from the location of the plane.

Whenever a signal is intercepted from an aircraft, the other side takes a bearing immediately. If the location is one in which they have forces, it tells them that those forces have been spotted. If they have no forces there, then it would indicate that our plane had been in contact with friendly vessels. Hence the importance of transmitting nothing until well clear of our own ships.

Because of strict radio silence, it is only by thus employing passing aircraft as traffic relay stations that our surface ships can communicate with shore points, except when in actual contact with the enemy.

Aircraft sightings were frequent during the remainder of the day, for we were steaming in the area of dense searches from all the Marshall's bases. Freed from the grip of the storm that almost enabled the Japs to take over Eniwetok, those bases were fanning out their airborne eyes in all directions to search the seas which so lately had harbored a dangerous threat. Shortly before noon, we intercepted a reconnaissance report of wreckage and large oil slicks in the area of the previous night's excitement. No survivors were reported.

At sundown, we turned for the last time into the wind, and brought our combat patrol and the TBF search planes back aboard. Then we settled down for the night, steaming smoothly along under a clear, starlit sky.

In the early morning twilight next day, the lookout reported land on the port bow. Dimly, we made out the surf-lined, palm-covered flat glob of coral that is Ebadon Island, northwesterly tip of the more than ninety islets that make up Kwajalein Atoll. At 0648, with Ebadon abeam, distant two miles, we changed course to 121°, and stood toward Gea Channel.

For nearly four hours, we trudged along past the chain of insignificant coral islets and reefs that constitute the southwestern border of the atoll. It was hard to believe that these unimpressive patches of sandy outcrop were key elements in a gigantic world struggle; that their change of sovereignty marked an important

step toward the doom of an empire of savages whose main islands lay a little over two thousand miles to the northwest.

At precisely 1030, we rounded to and slowed down to shape course for crooked, narrow Gea Channel. Though now busily concerned with conning the ship, Meadows took time out to give our navigator a pat on the back for the outstanding accuracy of his estimated time of arrival computed the previous day. That's the sort of thoughtfulness than can make an ordinary crew into a superb team.

When you first sight Gea Channel entrance from the northwest, it looks as though someone had made a mistake in labeling it as an entrance to the lagoon. Inhospitable coral reefs rim its outer mouth, and one can't see a clear passage for even the short length of the channel. But as a ship rounds to so as to approach close aboard from the southwest, the channel opens out. In calm weather, South Pass, some three miles to the southeast of Gea, looks much more inviting, with generously wide blue water between its coral borders. But only three fathoms beneath that blue water lie coral reefs waiting to tear the bottom off any ship deceived by the apparent generosity of its size.

Cautiously, we threaded our way through the narrow passage. I think we all heaved a sigh of relief when we found ourselves inside the lagoon. We changed course to 128°, and stood toward Kwajalein Island. Twenty minutes later, we checked our way and the anchor splashed into the calm water of the lagoon just off Enubuj Island. We came to anchor in twenty-four fathoms of water, a little less than five miles from Kwajalein Island. To approach any closer is to invite impalement on the coral pinnacles that stud the lagoon close to the main island.

Airplanes cavorted overhead as we came to our berth. Among them were quite a few SB2Cs which we recognized as being Marine Bombing Squadron 733, the lads who had flown off our deck two days before to help blast a Jap task force out of existence.

Our destroyers, which had stayed outside the channel as an anti-submarine screen during the critical period when we had to slow the ship to negotiate the passage, now stood smartly into the lagoon in a well disciplined column. Precisely aligned at five hundred-yard intervals, they dropped their anchors astern of us. Ahead, the transport which we had sent south to keep out of the fight swung comfortably to her hook.

Sighting beyond the transport, we could make out the palm trees and low buildings of Kwajalein. Towering over its surroundings was the old water tank of the South Sea Trading Company's plant, still standing but a little the worse for wear as a result of the shelling that had preceded the American landing on the island.

I had asked Meadows about letting liberty parties go ashore when we reached our berth. But he decided against it, reasonably pointing out that we would have to get going as soon as our marine passengers and their gear were unloaded. At best, only a small proportion of the crew could be spared for shore liberty, and he felt that to let some go and keep the greater part aboard hard at work would not be a very equitable arrangement. I agreed.

On the way down, I had drawn up an operations order to govern our sortie from Kwajalein when the unloading job was done and we would resume our interrupted journey toward Espiritu. Meadows glanced through it, signed his approval, and I sent it below to be mimeographed for distribution to the destroyers and the transport.

Scarcely had we come to anchor, when Higgins boats swarmed alongside to take off our passengers and their equipment. Our deck was a noisy, busy place with gear and men moving about to the accompaniment of orders shouted by our bosun. The messenger of the watch reported to me with word from the officer of the deck that a launch bearing an officer representing the commander of the Kwajalein garrison was standing toward the ship. I sent word to Meadows, and then went down to the quarterdeck to greet our visitor.

Right astern of his boat was another, carrying the captain of the transport. Boarding calls would be frequent for the next few hours. And Meadows would have to go ashore to pay his respects to the local big shots. So I looked forward to a busy few hours running the ship while the skipper observed the social amenities.

IN THE midst of the hurry and bustle, the aviators had nothing to do. Most of them were on the flight deck taking sunbaths, or down in the wardroom matching for cokes. But standing just abaft the starboard gangway was a lone, silent figure. I recognized young Ensign Whiteside, gazing wistfully toward the transport. The news that there would be no liberty while in port had probably been discouraging to the kid. That blond nurse of his would undoubtedly have accorded him a proper warrior's welcome had he been able to get over there to the transport.

Huntington joined me on deck, and we exchanged some gags about how cruel the fates can be to young love at times. My yeoman interrupted us to report that he had the operations order all mimeographed and in envelopes ready for distribution to the other ships.

"The skippers of the other ships will all be over here," I told him. "So just leave them in my office, and I'll pass them out. The captain of the transport is already on board. Bring his copy up here now."

The yeoman saluted and left to carry out my instructions. But by the time he had returned with the copy of the order that was to be given to the transport skipper, I had another, much better idea.

I called young Whiteside over from his gloomy watch at the starboard rail.

"Whiteside," I told him, "this is a copy of an operations order which is to be handed personally to the captain of the transport. Ask the officer of the deck to call away a boat for you. Go over to the transport. If the captain isn't aboard, wait for him."

Whiteside seemed a little puzzled.

"But, Commander," he started to say, "I just saw the transport skipper here on—"

Huntington grabbed him by the arm, and spun him around toward the gangway.

"Get going, dope, get going!" he said. "Don't you know better than to argue with your seniors?"

A smile of understanding lit up the kid's face.

"Yes, sir," he said. "Aye aye sir! Thank *you*, sir!"

He raced past the officer of the deck, and started down the gangway. A few steps down, he remembered one should salute the officer of the deck and the ship's colors before going over the side. He leaped back up to perform this formality, while the watch detail looked on a bit puzzled by his antics. Then he started down again in his mad flight from the ship, only to realize that he had forgotten to ask for a boat. I guess he would have been willing to swim if the choice were his, rather than wait the endless five minutes it would take for the boat to come around to the gangway.

Hurrying back up, he again saluted the now thoroughly bemused officer of the deck.

"Sir," I heard him say hurriedly, "I have orders to go to the transport. I request a boat."

While he fidgeted under the quizzical stare of the officer of the deck, the bugler sounded the call, "Away the motor whaleboat."

When I left the deck, he was leaning eagerly over the rail as though by willpower he could speed the boat crew's leisurely moves to man the little craft and get it under way. I went down to Meadows' cabin to join the talk with the visitors. The captain was obviously in justifiably high glee, recounting the story of what had happened.

"I've sent over an operations order for the trip south," he was telling the transport skipper. "But that may be changed. They know now we're something more than a doggoned freighter. So they'll probably give us orders to let you go on with a destroyer's escort, and bring us back to join a task force."

There was a knock on the door, and a messenger entered.

"Priority dispatch from Comsopac, sir," he said.

"Ah, this is probably our new instructions now," Meadows said, snatching the envelope and ripping it open.

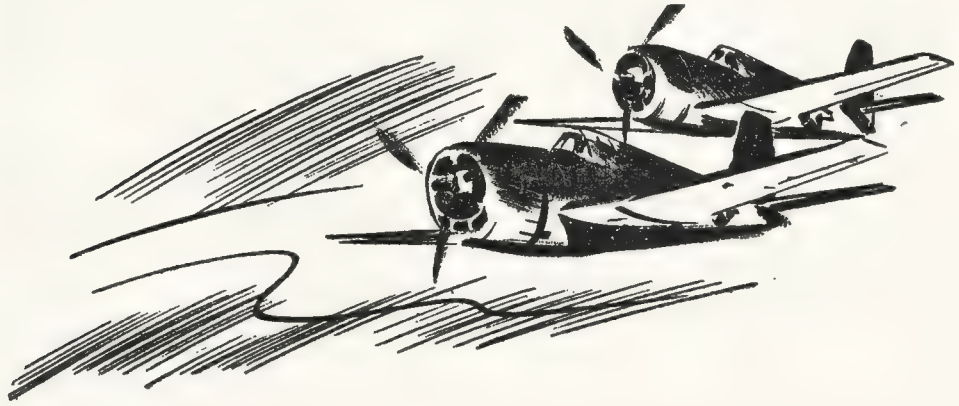
The glee left his face as he read, replaced by a set look that covered something he didn't want any one else to know about. He handed the dispatch to me. It read:

> REPORT LATEST ESTIMATED TIME ARRIVAL ESPIRITU SANTO. IMPORTANT YOU EXPEDITE ARRIVAL TO LOAD PLANES FOR OVERHAUL NOW CROWDING LOCAL DOCK FACILITIES.

The messenger spoke up.

"Is there any answer to go, sir?" he asked.

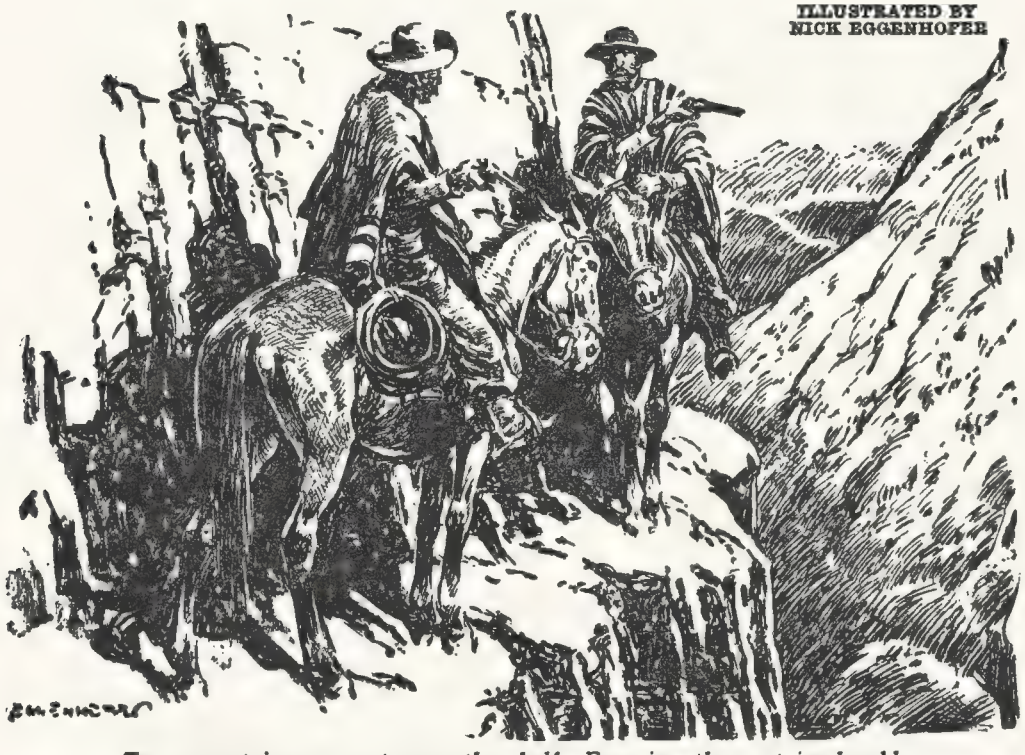
But I shooed him out of the room. I figured it would be better for the skipper to cool off before composing a suitable reply to a four-star admiral.



TRACKERS—SOUTHERN STYLE

By ROBERT L. GRIMES

ILLUSTRATED BY NICK EGGENHOFER



Two mountain men met upon the shelf. Enemies, they sat implacably upon their horses, face to face. In the morning one man was gone.

I

THE MOUNTAINS

YOUR true mountain man—a *baquiano*, or pathfinder, or guide—is reserved and confident. His taciturnity comes from spending long hours in the rarefied atmosphere and solitude of rocky fastnesses. His self-confidence derives from looking two inches beyond the toes of his boots at death in the abyss below. The *baquiano* usually dies peacefully at home in bed. If it were otherwise, he could hardly be called a *baquiano*.

South American urbanites are often amazed at the skill of the mountain man. He will spend an evening drinking in some lonely *pulpería* perched high in the sierra, then set off on his horse down the steepest trail at the same speed he employs in daylight. If he has a job guiding you, he will set off without hesitation on the wildest night of the year. In darkness approximated only by a fireless Hades, he will feel the texture of the soil and tell you where you are. Or pull an herb and taste it, or smell a root or leaf, and tell you how many leagues it is to the end of the trail, or to water.

Some stories about the *baquiano* have been repeated so many times as to become almost legend. The famous Buzzard's Pass, high in the Andes, is a favorite setting for these stories. In one place the trail is merely a twenty-two-inch shelf winding about the shoulder of the cliff. At one's right elbow is cold, unyielding stone. Under one's left elbow an abyss, its tree-lined basin looking soft and velvety at a

mere three thousand feet. On Buzzard's Path your horse knows better than to take a deep breath.

Before you start out along this shelf, you pull a pistol and fire a shot into the air. Then you listen. If there is no reply, you set out.

Once two travelers met in the middle of the shelving path. After mutual accusations of carelessness, each broke his revolver and showed a fired cartridge. They tossed a coin. The loser slid off the rump of his mount, gave the horse's head a quick jerk, then retreated along the path on foot. The men had fired their warning shots at the same time.

Upon another occasion two mountain men met upon the shelf. Enemies, they sat implacably upon their horses, face to face. There was no sound but the whistling of the wind, the distant scream of some condor.

The sun dropped. The depths below darkened in early shadow. The sky faded. The air became intensely cold. The two men continued to face each other.

At some time in the night there was a slight noise. In the morning one man was gone. The other spoke to his horse and went ahead.

BAQUIANOS are said to be able to invoke the spirits of the mountains. They are particularly in league with the condor, that astute and fierce bird of the higher mountain regions. It is possible for the *baquiano* to inspire the condor to molest and even kill unwelcome travelers.

It is said that once a certain captain engaged an Indian guide to cross a mountain range. Several times before reaching the heights the captain abused and beat the Indian.

Upon arriving at a narrow pass, the guide suggested to the captain that he rest his horse before going further. Then the Indian went forward presumably to inspect the trail, but actually to invoke the aid of some condors wheeling in the distance. Shortly after, he bade the captain follow him.

At the narrowest part of the trail two condors swooped down on the captain and his horse. They screamed and flapped their wings. The horse jumped, and man and mount plunged into the treetops far below.

There may be some basis to such a story-legend. Though the condor prefers carrion, he relishes fresh meat when hungry, and it is said he will attempt scaring an animal off some precarious perch in order to get it.

The safest way to negotiate a dangerous pass is to sink your teeth firmly into the folds of your blanket, and let your horse do the rest. Biting your blanket keeps evil mountain spirits at a distance.

Condor hunting is a difficult and at times dangerous sport. A wealthy sportsman from the city once complained to his guide, a gaucho from a plateau ranch, about hunting for four days without bagging more than one small bird.

The old gaucho smiled and remarked that dexterity was worth more than bullets in catching condors, and that the biggest condor in the province might be caught by hand.

Astonished, the sportsman bet the guide fifty dollars it couldn't be done.

The guide drove an aged cow into a ravine, and shot her. He disemboweled the carcass, scattering the offal far and wide. He bathed in the blood. He half-skinned the animal, then crawled into the barrel, leaving a flap of skin hanging down over the opening.

Within a few minutes, while the sportsman and his party hid in a nearby cavern, a number of vicious condors were tearing at the cow's carcass. The old guide chose the largest, reached out, and grabbed his legs. These he held, keeping himself well-covered with the hide, until the others could come and subdue the bird, taking due precautions against the condor's beak which in a second can strip a piece of skin a foot long from a man's arm.

Later, the old gaucho demonstrated how the condor may be made to commit suicide. With the point of his knife, he quickly blinded both eyes of the bird. Then he set him free.

The condor flew upward in a sharp, quick spiral. At a height of several thousand feet, he leveled off. Then, flying blindly, but at express-train speed in a straight line, he dashed himself into the side of a cliff.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

BUY WAR BONDS!

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

II

THE PAMPAS

THOUSANDS of words have been written about the gaucho or pampas cowboy. Little mention has been made of the *rastreador*, or pampas tracker. Deerslayer and his enemy, the wily Mingo, were novices compared to the South American *rastreador*.

Where the North American Indian had moist soil, leaf mold, thick grass, and often bushes or tree limbs to provide trace in tracking, the *rastreador* has sand, stony soil and sparse grass to work through.

Scientists have wondered at the ageless, microscopic qualities of the *rastreador's* eyes. He reads track and trace as a scholar reads a book; and his memory retains the image of patterns and shapes and depths of indenture with amazing accuracy. A good *rastreador* will know the trace of hundreds of people—and their mounts—and his community.

Every gaucho practices the art of *rastreador* in some degree. Sarmiento, in *Civilización y Barbarie en la República Argentina*, tells of meeting a peon in a path some two feet wide, dusty and full of variegated tracks and markings. The peon looked at the trail, said, "Yesterday, Don Zapata from the St. Louis sierra, passed by here with a pack of mules. . . He was riding a black mule, a very good one. . . The others were loaded. . ."

Sarmiento found, upon inquiry, that it had been a year since the peon had seen Don Zapata's mule, and examined his trace.

The *rastreador* dresses in a light cotton gown, reaching midway between knee and ankle, and often carries a light whip, or a stick or staff. His bearing is dignified and prudent. His statements have the weight of material evidence in courts; rarely does a thief or criminal protest the statements of a *rastreador*. Everyone treats him with great respect, Sarmiento points out—the rich man, because at some time he may need the tracker's services as a matter of protection to his wealth; the poor man, because a finger pointed by the *rastreador* is synonymous to a jail sentence.

One famous tracker named Calíbar served as official *rastreador* in his province for forty years. It is told of him that once while on a trip to Buenos Aires, a thief entered his house and stole a fine saddle. The next morning, Calíbar's wife found a track and covered it with a basket. Two months later Calíbar returned. He glanced at the fading trace, and apparently forgot about the theft.

But a year and a half later, while Calíbar was walking along a street in a certain town, he saw the thief's track. He entered a house and in a back room found his saddle hanging.

On another occasion a criminal condemned to death escaped from prison. Calíbar was engaged to track him down. The fugitive knew that Calíbar would be after him. He exercised every possible trick to throw the noted *rastreador* off. He doubled back, walked on stony soil, ran on tip-toe for miles, and finally began wading in an irrigation ditch.

Calíbar was also aware of the importance of this run; as a matter of honor, he could not fail. He trailed the fugitive at top speed.

When Calíbar came to the irrigation ditch, he followed alongside for some time. Finally he paused and indicated a spot. "Here he left the water," he said. "There is no trace, except a drop of water on a blade of grass."

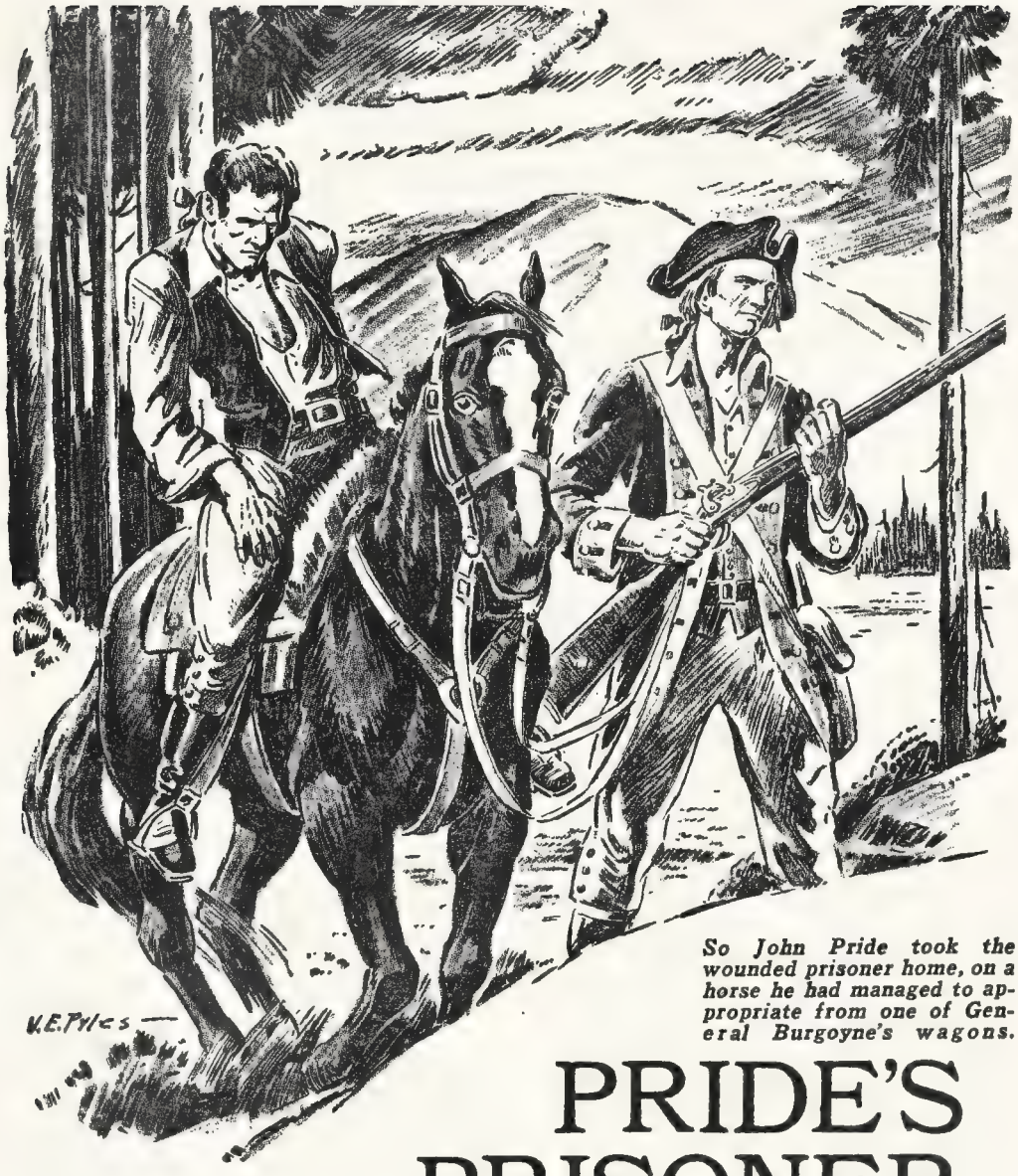
Nearby was a vineyard. Calíbar circled it, then called the soldiers. "He's inside," he said.

And they found the fugitive who, on the next day, was executed.

Once in a certain town some political prisoners were trying to escape. All plans had been made, friends were ready with a carriage in waiting, etc., when one of the men exclaimed, "And what about Calíbar?"

The others answered in alarm, "Yes! Calíbar!"

The project was put off until their families were able to get in touch with the famous *rastreador*. By certain means Calíbar "was persuaded to remain at home ill for four days after the escape was effected."



So John Pride took the wounded prisoner home, on a horse he had managed to appropriate from one of General Burgoyne's wagons.

PRIDE'S PRISONER

ILLUSTRATED BY V. E. PYLES

By WILLIAM ARTHUR BREYFOGLE

NOT everyone, in those days and that part of the country, could afford to have a likeness done. The portrait is evidence of Thomas Burke's comparative prosperity. In his later years, at least, for it was painted when he was an old man. The colors have darkened, as they do in the work of wandering, anonymous artists of the early nineteenth century. But you may still discern a sort of twinkle in the blue eye, as at a private amusement. At the bottom of the canvas, lettered in yellowing white, is a punning device that may have had something to do with that twinkle: *"Pride's Prisoner, Proud to be held by Pride."* The family lives in Boston now, and has for generations. But the portraits were brought down from the old house in the Green Mountains, and the story came with them. If it has no other interest, you may like to hear about Thomas Burke becouse he was one of

our very earliest immigrants. He didn't even wait for the war to end.

So this is the story.

JOHN PRIDE lived north and east of Bennington, on a farm he had cleared with his own hands. But it was from Bennington that he marched out with the Green Mountain Boys, to help whip General Burgoyne. He took a prisoner and, when the fight was over, Thomas Burke went home with him. There wasn't much of any other arrangement for prisoners, and John Pride was sorry for this boy. Being a New Englander, he wouldn't admit that. He said he wanted to show his old woman that he hadn't just been projectin' around with hard-cider drinkers. She'd kind of sniffed when he went off to the fighting. The fact was, Burke had a rifle-bullet through the calf of his leg, and needed to lie quiet until that could heal. They couldn't turn him loose to go back to his own army, because it didn't exist any more. So John Pride took him home, on a horse he had appropriated from one of General Burgoyne's wagons. There was only one horse, and John Pride walked.

Thomas Burke nursed a hurt to his vanity, as well as to his leg. He was sullen, mistrustful. He hadn't allowed for capture, in his conception of what war might be like. It was an inglorious end to his adventures, and they'd laugh at him for it if ever he got back home.

"Where's home?" Pride asked him.

"It depends. My uncle's got a farm a piece above Montreal, on the river. I stayed there till last year."

"How'd you come to get into the army?"

"They wanted men who wouldn't get lost in the woods. Yes, and needed them, too! You call it an army? Why, General Burgoyne had thirty wagons, just for his own baggage. Thirty wagons!"

"He hasn't got them now," said Pride, and reached out to pat the horse. "But I meant, why didn't you stay where you was, 'stead of comin' to pester us? What harm did we ever do you?"

Thomas Burke shifted uneasily on the horse's bare back, and Pride asked at once whether his leg hurt. It didn't, the boy said; it just kind of ached.

"You never did me any harm, till one of you put a ball through my leg. I joined the army because there wasn't much else to do, and I didn't want to go back to my uncle's farm. He worked me pretty hard. I guess you could say I came along to see the fun. There were a good many like me, who did just the same. We didn't hear much about the kind of war it was, or who we were going to fight. The Germans were real bewildered, right from the first."

John Pride shook his lean head—half in token of sympathy, half to dismiss the subject. He didn't understand a great deal about the war himself. He'd taken his rifle and gone down to Bennington, but that was because John Stark had sent out a call for men, and it was their own farms and woods they were fighting for. Pride was glad that the fighting was over, and that he still had a whole skin. Getting late in the summer now, and he had to hump himself for home and get the crops in.

It was evening when they reached the place, and the last three miles of their way had taken them through unbroken woods. John Pride led the weary horse. He was tired himself. Except to yawn, he hadn't opened his mouth for an hour. Thomas Burke's leg pained sharply, and his lips were pressed tightly together in his pale face. They came out into a clearing, and a dog bounded to meet them, barking. Two women came to the door of the cabin, and John Pride waved to them. Burke observed all this with a queer detachment, like a spectator and nothing more. The younger woman ran forward, and the low sun cast her shadow far before her. Thomas Burke was trying to make out what she looked like when he reeled suddenly and fell from the horse in a dead faint.

They had made a bed for him, on one side of the hearth. When he came to, the reek of wood smoke was in his nose and the sting of apple-whisky in his throat. He choked, and John Pride took the cup from his lips. "That's better!" he said encouragingly. "The women didn't know but what I'd fetched them home a corpse!"

The women stood just behind him—Susan, his wife, and Elizabeth, his daughter. They dididn't wait for any introduction, so probably John Pride had told them about him already. Susan said, "First off, we got to get you so's you'll rest easy. Then we'll attend to your leg, and fix you a bite to eat. You look wore out. Can you set up till I pull your jacket off?"

Thomas Burke managed it, with some help from the girl. The wound in his leg had begun to bleed again, and he felt weak and giddy. He heard Susan Pride exclaim when she had undone the clumsy bandage, and the girl said softly, "Oh!" They poured a little of the apple-whiskey into the torn and angry flesh, and Burke had to fight to keep the tears out of his eyes. Almost at once after that, he lost consciousness again. There was a stew bubbling in an iron pot, and he remembered thinking that it smelled good. But then for twelve hours he forgot that he was hungry and hurt and a prisoner. He slept without stirring while John Pride told his women all about the fighting.

BEING a prisoner proved the easiest part of warfare. Thomas Burke hadn't known what would be expected of him, but he had never contemplated being treated as a guest. When his leg had begun to heal and he

could hobble about, leaning on a stick, he spoke to John Pride about that.

"It isn't that I'd complain," he said. "But it don't seem regular! From what I hear, a prisoner's kept under guard, and—"

"Who's to guard you, with the crops to get in? And anyways, how're you to run off, when you can't even walk a spry gait?"

"I know. But I'm a bother to you, and it ain't right. I ought to be working, at least."

And John Pride approved that sentiment. He considered, rubbing his chin. "If you could make out to do it sittin' down, there's the winter's wood to be cut. Susan'd snatch me baldheaded if she heard me speak of it, but I'm 'way behind with the work. It's what comes of soldierin'."

"I'll cut the wood, if you give me an axe. I can sit on one log and hack at another. By the time I get it all cut, maybe I can stand, to pile it."

That was how Thomas Burke spent most of September, in spite of the women's protests. He felt better, now that he had something to do. And he could think just as well cutting wood as lying by the hearth.

There was plenty to think about. He had to consider what was to become of him, once the war was over. He hadn't much of anywhere to go, and not a foot of land to call his own. His uncle wanted none of him, except on starvation terms, and all his own people were dead. He wasn't a boy any more, either; he was rising twenty-two, and it was high time he settled to something steady. Thomas Burke thought about all that, in the clear, autumn weather, and came to no conclusion. He'd never thought much about it before. Until now, he'd always taken things pretty much as they came.

You couldn't just go on doing that, he had discovered. Not when it brought you a ball through the leg, and the predicament of being a prisoner. The war was bound to set you thinking, if anything did. Thomas Burke had marched with a few other foot-loose Canadians like himself, a handful of American Tories, a parcel of Indians whom he profoundly distrusted, and something like four hundred German dragoons, dismounted and making their painful way on foot. Burgoyne knew nothing about frontier warfare, nothing about the woods. A worse shock still was to find that they were sent, with that haphazard, ill-starred array, to fight against men much like themselves. It didn't make sense! Before the Americans became rebels, they had been farmers, hunters, frontiersmen. They fought well, but it was a safe bet that they wanted to get back to their own affairs. Nothing had been said about all that when Burgoyne was recruiting his Army of Canada.

Shyly at first, he began to share his thoughts with Elizabeth Pride. The girl worked near him, digging potatoes while he cut wood. The dog lay in the hazy sunlight and watched them both. Elizabeth had an unexpected and flattering interest in him as a man of travels and adventures. Thomas Burke had never thought of himself in just that light.

"Because, while it's happening, it don't seem like an adventure. It's a lot of trouble, and you wish it was over. Or maybe I'm just not the sort that adventures happen to."

She demurred. "You've been all up and down the country, betwixt here and Canada. Not a great many can say as much."

"It wasn't by choice! I'd as lief have a place of my own, and work it." He risked a liberty. "Like Daniel Crothers," he said.

Elizabeth took that calmly. "Nothing much happens to Dan Crothers, it's a fact."

Thomas Burke looked at her then. "But your father says he's done well. He's got his own farm cleared, and he's still young."

Surprisingly, the girl asked, "What did you think of him?"

"He didn't give me much chance. He spoke short to me."

He wasn't looking, so he didn't see her smile. "I know. He don't allow that you ought to be here. He's for having you shipped off somewheres where you'd be kept close, guarded."

Burke's blow was clumsy, and the axe stuck in the wood. "I guess that's right," he said, working it loose, struggling with a feeling of oppression. "I guess that's what a prisoner ought to expect."

That was all he said. But he fought against all the rest that he wanted to say—that they had saved his life, like as not; that a son of the house couldn't have been treated any better; that he'd give his right hand to trade places with Daniel Crothers, a free man, with the high privilege of coming to court Elizabeth. It stuck in his throat, half-choked him. But a prisoner, owing them as much as he did, had no right to talk like that. Only, if they ever did send him off to a place where he'd be kept close, guarded. . . Well, he was a prisoner already, and it wasn't *that* he minded!

He kept his head down, so that he wouldn't have to look at the girl. The silence had lasted a long time. When he looked up at last, Elizabeth was lifting her bushel-basket, her back turned to him. She wasn't smiling now. He struggled to his feet and limped toward her. "I'll help," he said awkwardly.

She swung the basket out of his reach. "You needn't disturb yourself!" she said, and marched off, straight-backed and angry. For the soul of him, Thomas Burke didn't know what he had said or done to annoy her. He didn't see her again until supper-time, and then Daniel Crothers was there.

Daniel Crothers was their nearest neighbor, a bachelor, three or four years older than Burke, six or seven years older than Elizabeth. He hadn't been in the fighting with John Pride,

The girl had an unexpected and flattering interest in Tom as a man of travels and adventures.

though he'd taken his rifle and gone down to Bennington. The Green Mountain Boys had marched out before he got there, and there was nothing for him to do but turn around and come home. He spoke of that as a grievance.

Thomas Burke paid him no heed that evening. He sat staring at Elizabeth, instead, worrying over what he'd done to offend her. He didn't want to offend any of the Prides, least of all the girl. But there wasn't any way he could tell her that. He was a prisoner; he couldn't talk to any of them as an equal. Daniel Crothers rigidly ignored Burke's presence at supper, and maybe you couldn't blame him for it. And Elizabeth seemed to take her cue from Crothers. She didn't speak a word to Thomas Burke all evening.

WHY should she? the girl asked herself, undressing for bed in the loft that night. She was hurt and angry at his careful silence. She'd given him every opening a modest girl could, and she didn't understand Burke's scruples. What if he was, in a way, an enemy, a prisoner? Didn't they both speak the same language, and weren't they both young? Hadn't she waited on him hand and foot while his leg was healing? You couldn't nurse a man back to health without developing a proprietary feeling for him. You had a right to expect some warmth of feeling in return.

She brooded over the slight in silence, and her manner to Thomas Burke stayed cold. In his brief leisure, John Pride studied his daughter with a quizzical eye. Looked as if something itched her, he concluded. Looked as if she wanted something, and wouldn't own to wanting it. Same way, something had soured on Dan Crothers, the last while. Might be the same thing, for all John Pride knew, and he could guess what it was. But unless it got worse, he meant to keep out of it, himself. He had the crops to get in.

Late in September, they heard rumors of a fight at Stillwater, but the rumors were vague and unconfirmed. Two or three weeks after that, there was word that General Burgoyne, with his new army, had retreated as far as Saratoga. About the first of November, Daniel Crothers hurried over with the great news of Burgoyne's surrender. Crothers was exultant.

He caught them at mid-day dinner. Thomas Burke sat with his eyes cast down while Crothers talked. It wasn't so much the disaster to Burgoyne, whom Burke considered an incompetent commander. But he could scarcely mistake Crothers' intention of triumphing over *him*, Thomas Burke. The Prides understood that, too. They received Dan Crothers' news soberly.

"Surrendered!" Crothers cried. "Five thousand of 'em, and they surrendered to General Gates! So that's the end of the Canadians and the Indians raidin' our settlements, scalpin' and burnin' and murderin'! That's the end, but we'd be right to hold them to account for what they done already. It's like it was with the Indians, in the early times; what they need is to be taught a lesson they won't forget. What I can hear, there's not that much difference between Canadians and the savages, anyhow. And what I say is—"

John Pride interrupted. He had a quick, impatient frown. "It's sure, is it, that General Burgoyne's surrendered? That might bring the French in on our side. I heard John Stark talking about that. If they do come in—"

"Well and good!" said Crothers. "But we don't need them. We can win by ourselves. Ask Burgoyne! Ask any Canadian!"

John Pride's frown returned. "From what I saw at Bennington, if the whole army had been Canadians, it might have been another sort of story!"

"Maybe!" Crothers drawled. "I never saw but one, and he'd been taken prisoner. He didn't look real dangerous."

"It's the only kind you would see, a prisoner!" Elizabeth hadn't got up from her place, but the cold scorn in her voice cut like a knife. Her cheeks showed bright spots of color. "Dan Crothers, I allow you wouldn't be so mighty to any Canadian that had a gun. But you come here to crow over a man hurt in the fighting you never saw! Well, there's a better man and patriot than you sits down to eat with him, and glad to have him in the house. You take yourself off, with your talk of victories and surrenders! What part did you have in them, except to spread the news? Go along to where you're wanted, for you're not wanted here!"

When she had finished, the only sound in the room was the sputter of the fire. Daniel Crothers gaped at her, divided between anger and dismay. "I didn't mean anything!" he got out at last. "I only thought you'd want to hear about the surrender."

"So we did," said John Pride. "Yes—about the surrender, we was real glad to hear."

He laid a dry, telling emphasis upon the noun. It was a way John Pride had when he was angry.

He went back to his work in the fields as soon as dinner was over. The spring in Pride's step was only partly a result of the news of Saratoga. Better than that, to his way of thinking, was the discomfiture of Dan Crothers. Pride had never liked him, even in a country that made any neighbor a precious asset. Maybe they'd seen the last of him for a while now. He wasn't the sort of young fellow to be hanging around Elizabeth, not by a long shot.

Thomas Burke didn't go back to his woodcutting at once that afternon. He lingered at the door of the cabin, hoping for a chance to speak to Elizabeth. His time came when she came out with a pan of table-scraps for the pig. He followed her down to the pig-sty, and there he made his speech of thanks. He was so intent on framing it that he didn't notice how angry Elizabeth still was. He might not have noticed that, anyway, since he knew very little about girls. What he did know was that she had spoken up handsomely for him, a prisoner and a person of no consequence, a landless, portionless young man, even when he had his freedom. It put him vastly in her debt, but it made his words of thanks oddly halting, too, not at all as warm as he wanted them to sound. Thomas Burke had his own pride, though beggared of all else.

But he said, "I've come to thank you for taking my part, when Daniel Crothers was here. That was real kind, and I won't forget it."

"He needed his manners mended," Elizabeth said briefly, not looking at Burke.

"It was real kind," Burke repeated, shifting from one foot to the other. He sought for words, he who was never handy with them, and found none adequate. "I wanted to thank you," he said.

In a calmer mood, the very fact that his speech was halting and constrained might have commended it to the girl. But now she was still exasperated, not only with Daniel Crothers, and she rounded upon Burke. "You've said that before!" she cried. "And I heard you the first time! Well, and is that all you've got to say—that I was kind and you want to thank me?"

Thomas Burke didn't understand. He was dismayed. He'd been hoping that that former, inexplicable coldness of hers had melted, in her attack upon Crothers. He was modest in any estimate of himself. It didn't occur to him that Elizabeth might think of him as anything but a casual dweller in her father's house.

"No!" she echoed him. "You don't understand! And if you don't I won't make you! There's times when I think Dan Crothers was right, that a Canadian's kin to a savage! You'll take what a body does for you, whatever it is, and pay with thanks! With thanks!"

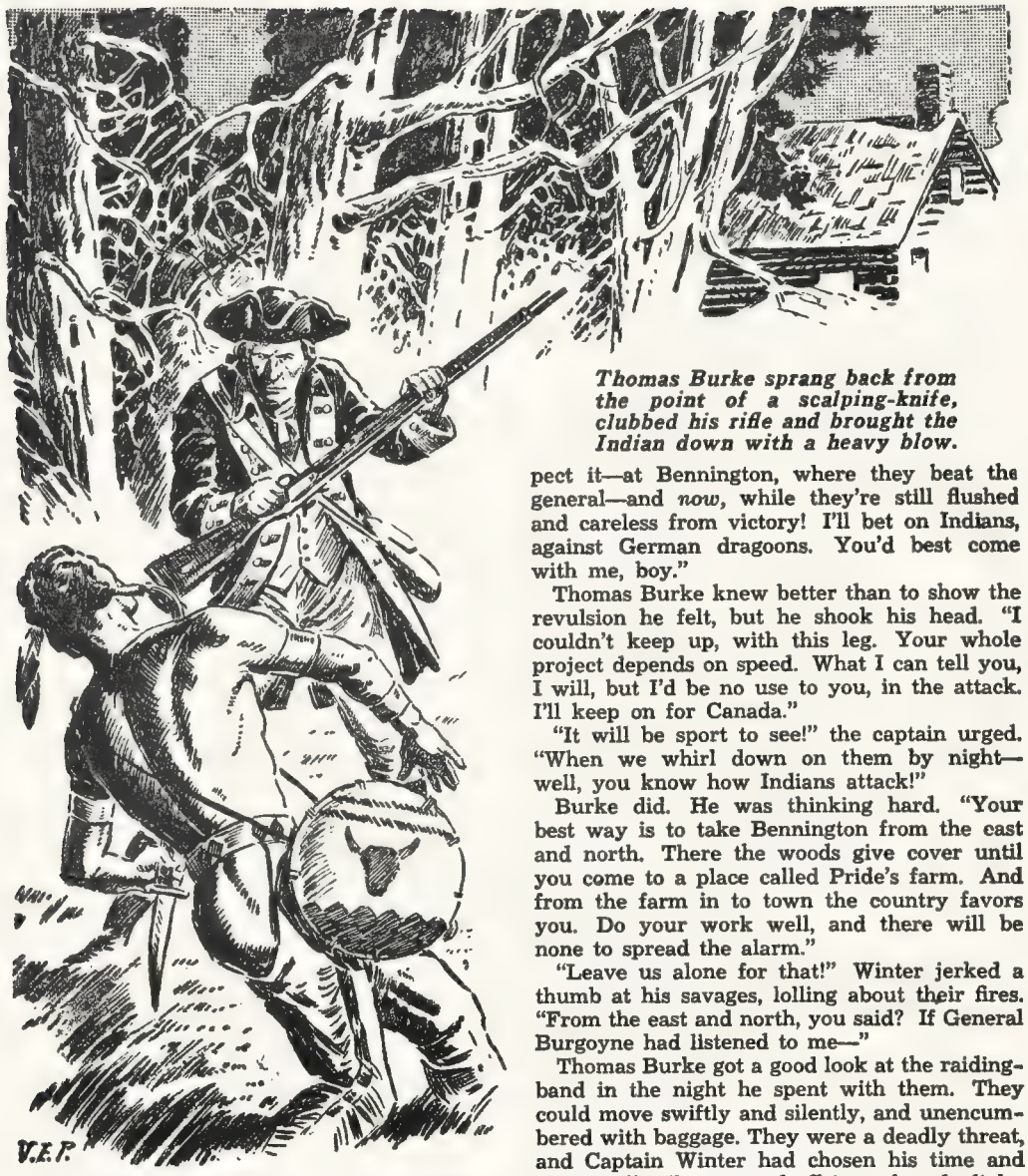
She flung down the scraps to the waiting pig, turned and ran for the cabin. "I hate you!" Thomas Burke heard her cry, over her shoulder.

HE took that at its face value. It shattered the precarious hopes he had been building, unconsciously, for the most part, ever since John Pride brought him here, a prisoner. Being a prisoner had never been irksome until now. It had meant being near Elizabeth. Thomas Burke stared down at the pig, and his thin face worked a little. It didn't speak well for him that he'd contrived to offend her, after all she'd done for him. He must be a pretty poor lot. The sooner he got out of Elizabeth's sight, the better.

He went off that same afternoon. It was a natural thing for a man to whom action came much more readily than speech. He had the knife John Pride had never asked him for, and he wasn't afraid of the woods. He had no plans, except that he meant to strike north for Canada, and there was no reason to postpone it. He took to the woods when no one was watching. Pride's Prisoner had escaped.

That is to say that he had escaped from John Pride's easy custody and the confines of John Pride's farm. Another captivity kept step with him, intangible, inescapable. He had the girl's clear face before his mind, do what he would, turn where he might. He had nothing else pursuing him—but then nothing else could be so certain and relentless. Thomas Burke proved that to himself during a long week alone.

In a week, he had worked his way up into the wild country where there were not even scattered settlements. There he fell in with Captain Jeremy Winter and the hundred-odd Indians under his command. Winter gave him the first full meal he had eaten since leaving



Thomas Burke sprang back from the point of a scalping-knife, clubbed his rifle and brought the Indian down with a heavy blow.

Pride's farm. Afterwards, they sat conversing.

There was evidence enough that the story Burke told was true. A scout for the Americans wouldn't be roaming the northern woods without a rifle. There was the wound, only just healed, in his leg, and he could give the names of most of Burgoyne's officers. A lucky meeting for them both, Winter said, and grinned.

"We can use you. I'll allow that General Burgoyne went about harrying the rebels in the wrong way. I said so, from the first, and the general proved me right. They listened to me after Saratoga! So here I am, with the proper irregulars for this work. I'll be down upon the rebels when and where they least expect it—at Bennington, where they beat the general—and *now*, while they're still flushed and careless from victory! I'll bet on Indians, against German dragoons. You'd best come with me, boy."

Thomas Burke knew better than to show the revulsion he felt, but he shook his head. "I couldn't keep up, with this leg. Your whole project depends on speed. What I can tell you, I will, but I'd be no use to you, in the attack. I'll keep on for Canada."

"It will be sport to see!" the captain urged. "When we whirl down on them by night—well, you know how Indians attack!"

Burke did. He was thinking hard. "Your best way is to take Bennington from the east and north. There the woods give cover until you come to a place called Pride's farm. And from the farm in to town the country favors you. Do your work well, and there will be none to spread the alarm."

"Leave us alone for that!" Winter jerked a thumb at his savages, lolling about their fires. "From the east and north, you said? If General Burgoyne had listened to me—"

Thomas Burke got a good look at the raiding-band in the night he spent with them. They could move swiftly and silently, and unencumbered with baggage. They were a deadly threat, and Captain Winter had chosen his time and place well. They moved off just after daylight, for the south, and Burke left them. He set his face toward Canada, and it was an hour before he turned and struck out south and by west. He had to make a wide circle around them, get ahead and stay ahead. There wouldn't be any rest for him, if he was to be in time.

If anything could be worse than the slow misery of his road north from Pride's farm, it was this return, sharp with haste and fear. Because all Captain Winter's boasts were justified. An attack from the north now would take Bennington and the district wholly by surprise. There was no one to give warning of that but Thomas Burke, and he couldn't be sure of his

weak leg. But it was the only thing he wasn't sure of. He forgot that he had once served under Burgoyne. He was absolved from loyalty to a command that proposed loosing the murderous savages upon unsuspecting settlements. His one prayer, hurrying along through the bare woods, was that Winter would come in from the direction of John Pride's farm. That way, the Green Mountain Boys could be ready for him. It was the only part of the country near Bennington that Burke could describe in convincing detail. He kept reminding himself that Captain Winter had seemed satisfied.

That was his only reassurance, and there was fear enough to outweigh it. He traveled by night, as well as by day, taking his course from the stars. He couldn't have slept, anyway, for thinking about Elizabeth.

It took him three days and three nights to get back to the vicinity of Bennington, and he couldn't have held out for another ten miles. When John Pride opened the door to his knock, Burke had to hold to the door-frame, to keep from falling. But in a moment he could lean on Elizabeth, instead.

HIS hand was heavy on her shoulder while he poured out his story to John Pride. Daniel Crothers was there, and he was the first to speak. "A trick," he cried, glaring at Burke. "He tried escape and loses heart, so back he comes with this wild talk."

John Pride told him to be still. "I'm off to tell John Stark. Dan, you'll some with me."

"And leave him alone with the women?"

"Just so! You been complainin' that you missed the last fight. I'll see that you don't miss another. Except for Tom Burke, it wouldn't have been any fight at all, but a massacre! I don't know but what he's a better American than you, Dan. I allow, John Stark'll think so."

John Stark certainly did think so. They gave Thomas Burke a rifle and he lay out behind a corner of the barn. Just after midnight, Burke heard a stealthy sound from the woods.

It came again, repeated along a wide front. The shadows moved and grew, stealing toward the open ground. Nothing stirred, and the Indians crept forward in a scattered line.

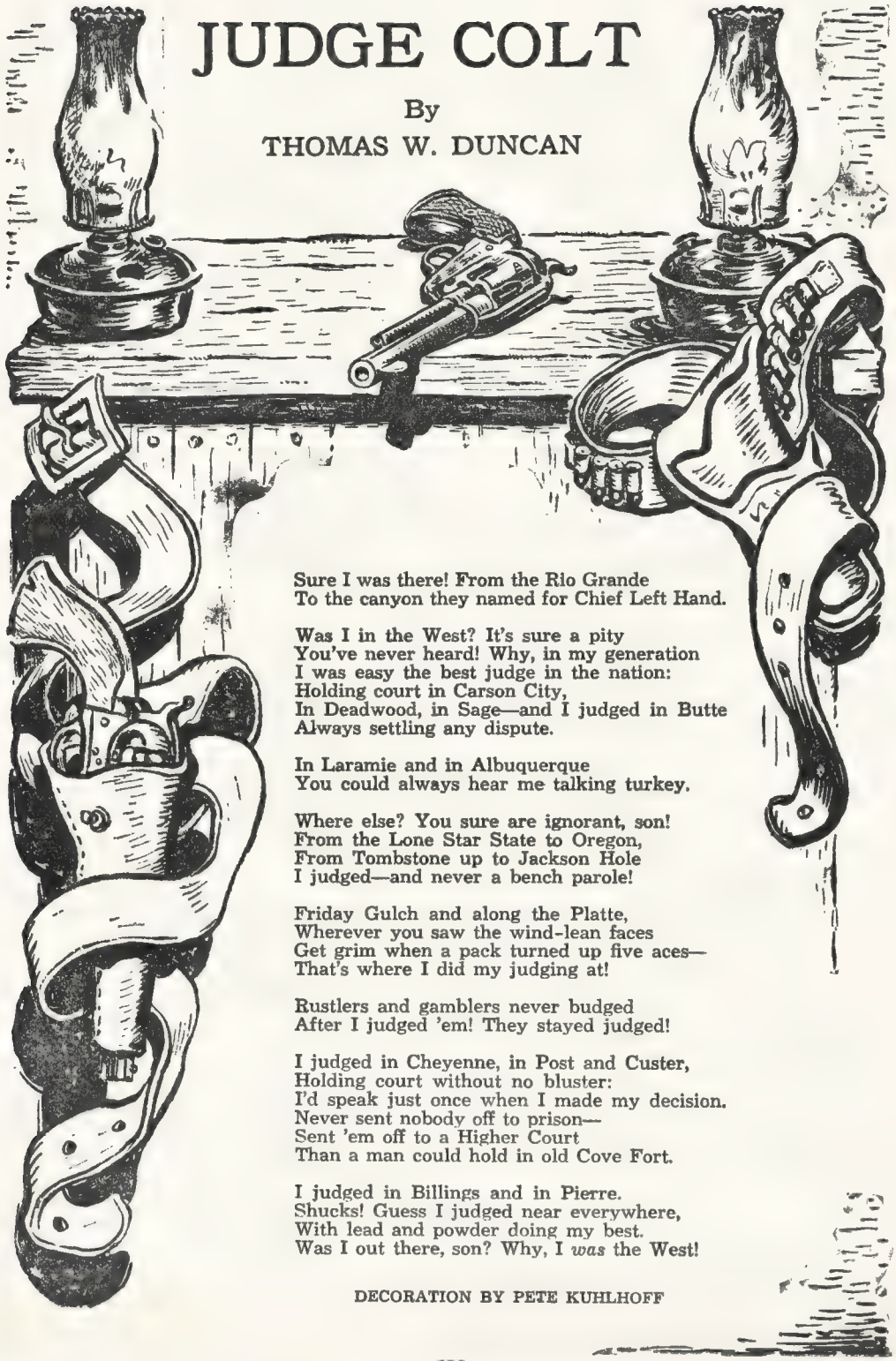
The night broke into stabbing, red light and the banging of rifle-fire. He heard the flanking-parties open up, from the woods—then the screeching of Winter's "Irregulars." The men were pouring out of the cabin and barn, and Thomas Burke jumped up and hurried forward with them, straining to see. He sprang back from the point of a scalping-knife, clubbed his rifle and brought the Indian down. An instant later, he closed with another brave. The blood ran down from a deep cut in Burke's head, but he kept both hands at the Indian's throat, in spite of his desperate struggles. He didn't even let go when the savage went limp beneath him, not until John Pride pulled him up. "Come along," Pride said. "He's a goner, that redskin. I heard there was drinks going, at the cabin. A couple of the boys fetched your friend Winter in. The fight's all over."

The cut on his forehead made him a good New Hampshireman, a man blooded with rebellion. More than that, it put him back in the care of Elizabeth, and this time he didn't neglect his opportunities.

They say he and Elizabeth prospered in later life, and the portrait goes to prove it. They say he was contented, too. He never tried to escape again.

JUDGE COLT

By
THOMAS W. DUNCAN



Sure I was there! From the Rio Grande
To the canyon they named for Chief Left Hand.

Was I in the West? It's sure a pity
You've never heard! Why, in my generation
I was easy the best judge in the nation:
Holding court in Carson City,
In Deadwood, in Sage—and I judged in Butte
Always settling any dispute.

In Laramie and in Albuquerque
You could always hear me talking turkey.

Where else? You sure are ignorant, son!
From the Lone Star State to Oregon,
From Tombstone up to Jackson Hole
I judged—and never a bench parole!

Friday Gulch and along the Platte,
Wherever you saw the wind-lean faces
Get grim when a pack turned up five aces—
That's where I did my judging at!

Rustlers and gamblers never budged
After I judged 'em! They stayed judged!

I judged in Cheyenne, in Post and Custer,
Holding court without no bluster:
I'd speak just once when I made my decision.
Never sent nobody off to prison—
Sent 'em off to a Higher Court
Than a man could hold in old Cove Fort.

I judged in Billings and in Pierre.
Shucks! Guess I judged near everywhere,
With lead and powder doing my best.
Was I out there, son? Why, I *was* the West!

DECORATION BY PETE KUHLHOFF

ASK ADVENTURE

Information you can't get elsewhere

OF THE birth and breeding of elephants.

Query: I wonder if you can give me some information about elephants? I was always under the impression that the elephant's life span was about the same as man's, and that an elephant wasn't worked until he was about twenty-five years old. That then the beast was worked for about twenty-five years more and then retired and that one seventy-five years old was a really ancient one. Is this true?

I was told the other day that the female carried her young for seven years before it was born. I doubted that.

Can you answer the following questions? (1) How often does a female elephant come in heat? (2) How long does she carry her young before it is born?

—J. A. Zetterberg,
Galva, Ill.

Reply by Gordon MacCreagh:—D'you know the story about the lady who asked the zoo keeper the same kind of question about the hippopotamus? And the keeper said, "Madam, me, I ain't knowin'. But I'm thinkin' that that sort o' information hadn't orter be of interest to nobody but a female hippopotamus."

So, supposing that you must have a female elephant, I hurry to give you your information before she pines away.

You are right about the approximate age of elephants. Though some in captivity have been known to reach upwards of a hundred years. For example, the famous "execution" elephant of Burma, whose job it was to step on the heads of condemned criminals and crack them like a coconut. That elephant, after the British capture of Upper Burma, was kept chained fore and hind foot in a space before the great Shwe Dagon Pagoda of Rangoon for tourists to feed bananas to; and, at the time of the Jap conquest, was still going strong. Estimated age, 123 years. Estimated, because Burmese statements as to the animal's age before the British conquest varied by as much as some seventy years.

The period of gestation—carrying the unborn young—for elephants is two years, not seven. Within the year the female *may* breed again; though often as much as four or five years pass between one calf and the next.

ON MATRICULATING at "jewelry school."

Query:—I would like to learn how to evaluate and appraise old gold, diamonds, other gems, etc. Can you tell me of any jewelers' school I would be able to attend to learn these things?

—Matthew Cullen,
118½ S. Main St.,
Port Chester, N. Y.

Reply by Victor Shaw:—To be perfectly frank with you, I've never heard of what you term a "jewelers' school." There may be something of the sort, but if so it's outside my scope of information.

So far as the competent appraisal of "old gold" goes, your task is comparatively simple and requires no very broad background of experience, or specific knowledge; although familiarity with methods of modern mercantile transactions would be most helpful, if you plan entering the business of buying and selling the commodities in question. But, if so, the accurate evaluation of gemstones is quite a different matter, particularly in the case of diamonds, and/or other precious stones.

The purchase of "old gold" involves accurate weighing, using an assayer's balance (or apothecary's scales), coupled with a calculation of the actual amount of fine gold in the ring, brooch, watch case, etc.; this calculation being based on the carat-weight of the article, and its value then reckoned at $35 per ounce Troy. This value is only for pure, refined gold, of course. This transaction is simple, as I say, and your profit lies wholly in your ability to buy at prices below actual value.

Gemstones, especially diamonds, emeralds, rubies, etc., are also valued at a certain price per carat, but this carat is not the

(Continued on page 139)

THE TRAIL AHEAD

Once in a while a manuscript comes to us that is so unusual, so out-of-the-ordinary in its content and method of presentation, that the only way it can be described is by that unsatisfactory phrase "off-trail" which ADVENTURE coined a good many years ago. Just such a piece of work is—

"TIMBER TOUGH"
By JOHN BEAMES

—which we bring you next month. Not fiction precisely—for its background, color, action and authentic detail is as factual as any article's we've ever printed—not an article exactly, either, for it has a hero and plot and characterization that you might expect to find only in an imaginative yarn. The story of a young man's initiation into that redblooded fraternity of lumberjacks who furnished the germs for the Paul Bunyan legends. . . . His education in the tricks of the trade, from "icing up" for the winter drive to sweating it out on the toughest task of all—the brutal mid-summer lake drive—with action and conflict and adventure in every paragraph. . . . Based on the author's own experiences in the Canadian wilderness lumbercamps after the turn of the century it gives you, with the brutal punch of a bull-of-the-woods, the finest picture of those roaring calk-pocked camps you've read since James Stevens.

"NEW GUINEA GOLD"
By THOMSON BURTIS

—takes you to the world's biggest island—back between this war and the last—when planes over the Owen Stanleys were a rarity instead of an everyday habit and no Jap troopers infested the jungles. In this first thrilling installment of a new three-part serial you'll need your fire-sticks and bêche-de-mer to go along on a hunt for lost bullion with four of the toughest South Pacific tramps that ever scuttled a schooner.

Plus another great Koropok novelette by Sidney Herschel Small—"The Last Banzai"—in which Llewelyn Davies gets himself tangled in the meshes of the submarine net guarding Tokyo Bay. . . . A glorious tale of medieval England—"The Miracle of St. Merrow"—by Henry John Colyton. . . . A fine Pacific flying story—"No Hiding Place Down There"—by Richard Sale. . . . "Willer the Wisp" —another gripping yarn of the RCMPs who patrol Canada's snowbound northland by H. S. M. Kemp. . . . As well as the usual informative features and departments which can't be found anywhere else but in—

On Sale May 6th

(Continued from page 137)

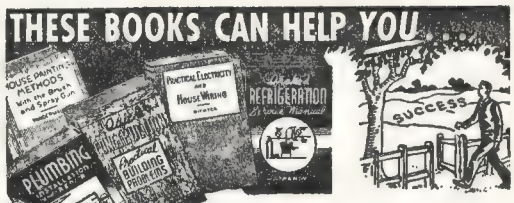
same as that used in designating the value of a given gold article. The carat used for gold marks only the proportion of pure gold contained in an alloy of gold with other metals put in to give it hardness and wearing qualities. That is, jewelers and assayers have divided the Troy pennyweight into 24C equal parts and called each part a carat. Thus coinage gold and the old style wedding rings, which contain $^{22}/_{24}$ths of pure gold are called "22 carats fine"—the lower standard used for watch cases, brooches, etc., which contain $^{18}/_{24}$ths of pure gold are called "18 carats fine," etc. Used thus, you see this carat has no weight at all, but denotes merely a ratio.

However, the carat used with precious stones has a fixed weight and was originally divided into "carat grains" or quarters, eighths, sixteenths, sixty-fourths, etc., but in recent years since the adoption of the international metric carat, it is divided decimally, which was put into effect by the U. S. Bureau of Standards on July 1, 1913. Since this date, we use the carat of 200 milligrams. This unit is now in universal use.

And use of this carat in weighing precious stones—using a delicately balanced Troy scale—is only the preliminary mechanical part of an appraisal of their actual value, for which determination there are no absolute fixed standards, but which depend upon an estimate based on the weight, cut, color, brilliancy, and perfection of the stone. With diamonds of the average smaller sized stones, their value rises in direct ratio to the increase in weight, but this isn't true with larger stones on which a price cannot be fixed usually, but depends largely upon such factors as the ability and desire of the buyer to purchase and own, etc. Beside this, and in all cases involving diamonds, emeralds, or rubies, price depends almost wholly upon an accurate appraisal of its brilliance and lack of flaws for any given weight. Rough diamonds usually averaged $8 to $15 a carat for run-of-mine stones, though in recent years this has raised a bit.

You may perhaps realize from the above rough outline that to become at all expert in gem valuation will require many years of study and experience and can't be learned in a few months of even intensive schooling. Much knowledge and experience is essential to even make sure a "diamond" is a true diamond and not artificial, or synthetic.

"Gems and Precious Stones" by Geo. F. Kunz; and "Gems and Gem Materials," Krause & Slauson, are books which may interest you.



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Notice: Many of our *Ask Adventure* experts are now engaged in government service of one kind or another. Some are on active duty in the Army or Navy, others serving in an executive or advisory capacity on various of the boards and offices which have been set up to hasten the nation's war effort. Almost without exception these men have consented to remain on our staff, carry on their work for the magazine if humanly possible, but with the understanding that for the duration such work is of secondary importance to their official duties. This is as it should be, so when you don't receive answers to queries as promptly as you have in the past, please be patient. And remember that foreign mails are slow and uncertain these days, many curtailed drastically. Bear with us and we'll continue to try to serve you as speedily as possible.

ASK ADVENTURE EXPERTS

SPORTS AND HOBBIES

Archery—EARL B. POWELL, care of *Adventure.*

Baseball—FREDERICK LIEB, care of *Adventure.*

Basketball—STANLEY CARHART, 99 Broad St., Matawan, N. J.

Big Game Hunting in North America: *Guides and equipment*—A. H. CARHART, c/o *Adventure.*

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Canoeing: *Paddling, sailing, cruising, regattas*—EDGAR S. PERKINS, 1325 So. Main St., Princeton, Ill.

Coins and Medals—WILLIAM L. CLARK, American Numismatic Society, Broadway at 156th St., N. Y. C.

Dogs—FREEMAN LLOYD, care of *Adventure.*

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Fly and Bait Casting, Tournament—"CHIEF" STANWOOD, East Sullivan, Maine.

Health-Building Activities, Hiking — DR. CLAUDE P. FORDYCE, care of *Adventure.*

Motor Boating—GERALD T. WHITE, Montville, N. J.

Motorcycling: *Regulations, mechanics, racing*—CHARLES M. DODGE, care of *Adventure.*

Mountain Climbing—THEODORE S. SOLOMONS, 6520 Romaine St., Hollywood, Calif.

Old Songs—ROBERT WHITE, 913 W. 7th St., Los Angeles, Calif.

Rifles, Pistols, Revolvers: *Foreign and American*—DONEGAN WIGGINS, 170 Liberty Rd., Salem, Oregon.

Shotguns, American and Foreign: Wing Shooting and Field Trails—ROY S. TINNEY, care of *Adventure.*

Small Boating: *Skiffs, outboard, small launch, river and lake cruising*—RAYMOND S. SPEARS, 11331 Burin Ave., Inglewood, Calif.

Swimming—LOUIS DEB. HANDLEY, 115 West 11th St., N. Y., N. Y.

Swords, Spears, Pole Arms and Armor—MAJOR R. E. GARDNER, care of *Adventure.*

Track—JACKSON SCHOLZ, R. D. No. 1, Doylestown, Pa.

Woodcraft—PAUL M. FINK, Jonesboro, Tenn.

Wrestling—MURL E. THRUSH, New York Athletic Club, 59th St. and 7th Ave., N. Y., N. Y.

Yachting—A. R. KNAUER, 6720 Jeffery Ave., Chicago, Ill.

SCIENTIFIC AND TECHNICAL SUBJECTS

Anthropology: *American, north of the Panama Canal, customs, dress, architecture; pottery and decorative arts, weapons and implements, fetishism, social divisions*—ARTHUR WOODWARD, Los Angeles Museum, Exposition Park, Los Angeles, Calif.

Aviation: *Airplanes, airships, airways and landing fields, contests, aero clubs, insurance, laws, licenses, operating data, schools, foreign activities, publications, parachutes, gliders*—MAJOR FALK HABMEL, 709 Longfellow St., Washington, D. C.

Entomology: *Insects and spiders; venomous and disease-carrying insects*—DR. S. W. FROST, 465 E. Foster Ave., State College, Penna.

Forestry, North American: *The U. S. Forestry Service, our national forests, conservation and use*—A. H. CARHART, c/o *Adventure.*

Forestry, Tropical: *Tropical forests and products*—WM. R. BARBOUR, care of U. S. Forest Service, Glenn Bldg., Atlanta, Ga.

Herpetology: *Reptiles and amphibians*—CLIFFORD H. POPE, care of *Adventure.*

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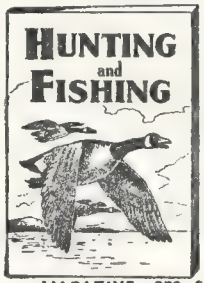

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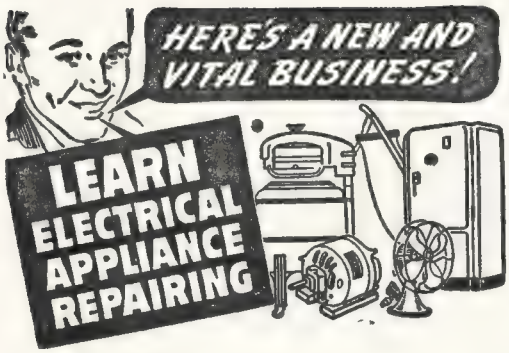

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I would like to hear from Albert "Shorty" Armstrong, and "Butsy" Butterfield, who were members of the 13th U.S. Infantry Band in 1924 at Fort Warren, Mass. Also Philip Smith, Jr., who lived on Gainsborough St., Boston in 1941. I have recently been discharged from Army Air Force and would like to hear from some of the old buddies of the old days. John J. Delaney, 227 Broadway, Cambridge 39, Mass.

Alex "Scotty" Mackie, age 34, weight 125, height 5'3", blue eyes, dark brown hair, missing since 1939. Last heard from in Cleveland, Ohio. Anyone knowing of his recent whereabouts please communicate with his brother, Robert Mackie, 3774 Highland Road, Cleveland 11, Ohio.

PFC George Allen Agogino, DET-H 997 Sig. Ser. Bn., APO 503 c/o Postmaster, San Francisco, Cal. wants to get in touch with Larence Griswold who wrote a book, "Tombs, Travels and Trouble." He also would like the name of the aviator who flew with Mr. Wallace Hope for the rebels in the Mexican uprising of 1928-29.

Anyone knowing the whereabouts of Max Franck, formerly of 442 S St., N.W., Washington, D.C.; Meyer Harwich, formerly of 13 Acchery Ter., Leeds, Eng.; or Phil Jaffe, a former printer of Cleveland, Ohio, now a rabbi, please communicate with Julius Bobinsky, 4701 N. St. Louis Ave., Apt. 11, Chicago, Ill.

R. Welker, 219-48th St., Union City, N. J. wants to hear from "Blackie" Fredericks, former crew member of the S. S. *President Roosevelt.*

Captain Rudolph Petersen who used to write sea stories formerly lived at Locust Street, 133 Street, Bronx, New York City, N.Y. Last heard from in 1940. Anyone knowing his present address please communicate with Norman Gilmartin, c/o General Delivery, Brooklyn General Postoffice, Brooklyn, N. Y.

(Continued from page 61)

though? He enjoyed life better'n a lot of people I knew half his age.

Maybe I was too soft-hearted. Why did I have to help Cap'n Orn to be skipper again? Why did I have to take a pet peeve out on Cap'n Oliver and them other cap'ns just because Cap'n Oliver pestered me into carving my name on my bunk?

Along about three P. M. I began to get a mite worried; it's about time the *Seal* was showing up. A sou'east wind was kicking up.

Then I sighted her. She was purling along, dipping her *jibboom* under a shower of spray.

In five minutes we were back aboard, dory and all. I noted with satisfaction and not much surprise that Cap'n Orn had his crew pretty well in hand. It was "Aye, aye, Cap'n Orn!" and, "That's right, Cap'n Orn!" and, "Be right there, Cap'n Orn!" Those old skippers sure were jumping around with a will.

"Now, one o' ye fellers gripe that dory down!" Cap'n Orn ordered.

"Aye, aye, Cap'n!"

"Now, ye, Cap'n Frederic, get the lead out'n your pants and lend a hand!" Orn shouted.

"Aye, aye, Cap'n!"

I got Cap'n Orn to one side.

"Worked out fine, eh?" I whispered.

"Sure did, Cap'n Preble," Cap'n Orn said, face glowing with renewed confidence. "Ye should've seen 'em when they couldn't find ary cook or Cap'n Gran'pa Queedy aboard. Took the stuffin' out'n 'em, it did; shook 'em all of a heap. Cap'n Hobbs popped all the buttons off'n his vest, he got so excited. Cap'n Frederic ain't whittled a shavin' and Cap'n Varp ain't been in his bunk all day."

I was quite relieved. Maybe now I could do some extra fine cooking in peace, with a normal ship under me once more. However, before I even so much as got the supper dishes stowed away, every man jack of 'em, from Cap'n Orn down, was calling me "Cap'n."

So how do you figure that one out, me being just a cook?

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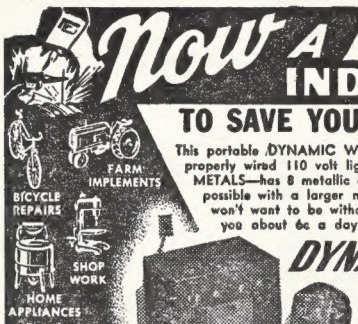

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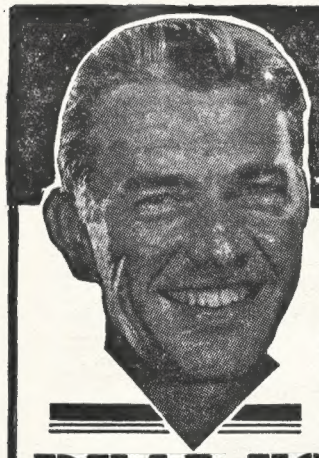

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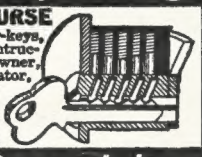

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In these days when, as you all know, production of all types of silverware has been sharply curtailed, we felt it was a lucky purchase indeed that made it even possible for us to make this amazing offer to our customers. We wish we had three times as many sets, the demand is so great and the supply so limited. That's why we are forced to say "First come—first served." Yes, this offer is good Only as long as our present supply lasts and may never be repeated again. So if you need Silverware, don't put off sending in your order. Do it now while you have a chance to get such a beautiful and valuable 30 piece set of quality Silver Plate at such a truly sensational saving.

Examine At Our Risk!

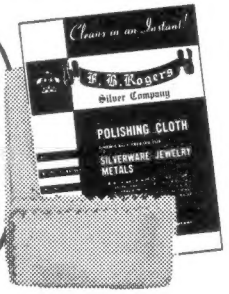
So sure are we that you will be thrilled and pleased beyond words with this luxurious 30 piece set of Quality Silver Plate when you see it, we cheerfully make this liberal offer. SEND NO MONEY. Simply fill out and mail the order coupon below. Immediately upon receipt of your order we'll rush you the complete 30 piece set in its luxurious anti-tarnish case. Upon arrival give postman the sale price of only $9.95 plus few cents postage and C.O.D. charges. Then examine the set for 10 full days. Show it to friends and family. Compare its quality and price with far more expensive sets. Then if you don't agree that it is far and beyond the loveliest set you've ever seen for so little money, return it to us and we'll refund every penny you deposited with the postman. Could anything be more fair? Your satisfaction is guaranteed at our expense! So how can you lose?

Includes **ANTI-TARNISH CABINET**

SEND NO MONEY *Mail Coupon Today*

★ **FREE** **Rogers Silver Polishing Cloth**

Yes, if you order at once, we will include this nationally famous chemically treated Silver Polishing Cloth absolutely FREE of charge. ★



NATIONAL NOVELTIES—Dept. S T 1
608 South Dearborn Street—Chicago 5, Illinois

Please rush 30 piece set of Quality Silver Plate complete with Anti-Tarnish Cabinet and Free Rogers Silver Polishing Cloth for 10 day examination. I will pay postman only $9.95 C.O.D. plus postage on arrival. It is understood that if I am not more than satisfied in every way I can return set in 10 days for complete refund.

Name_____
(Please Print Clearly)
Address_____
City_____ State_____

You save postage and C.O.D. fee by enclosing payment with order. Same money-back guarantee of satisfaction.

ANYONE WHO KNOWS CAN TELL THE REAL THING!

...THAT'S WHY CLEAR HEADS CHOOSE Calvert

If you've a taste for fine whiskey, you're certain to recognize Calvert as "the real thing". For it has a pre-war quality and excellence that simply can't be imitated.

That's probably the reason why, year in and year out, people who sell and serve Calvert tell us: "It's the whiskey most often asked for by name."

Once you taste this gloriously smooth and mellow blend, *you'll* keep on asking for Calvert, too. It's America's finest whiskey from the House of Blends!

Calvert Distillers Corp., N.Y.C. BLENDED WHISKEY
86.8 Proof. "Reserve": 65% Grain Neutral Spirits..."Special": 72½% Grain Neutral Spirits